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# GREAT MODERN BRITISH PLAYS

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# GREAT MODERN BRITISH PLAYS

SELECTED BY

J. W. MARRIOTT

EDITOR OF
"ONE-ACT PLAYS OF TO-DAY" ETC.

GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
LONDON BOMBAY SYDNEY

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# PREFACE

WHEN a noted literary critic on being asked "Which are the six best modern novels?" replied briefly, "Any six by Conrad," he delivered a judgment which was possibly idiosyncratic; but in modern drama the field is less open, and to say that the best six plays of our time are by Bernard Shaw is merely to state the obvious. There is no play by either Mr Bernard Shaw or Sir James Barrie in the following collection. The editor, in common with those who have compiled play-anthologies in the United States, deplores the absence of plays by these masters. He admits, at once, that his anthology is, in their absence, incompletely representative; and he adds that had he been able to follow his inclination Mr Shaw would have been represented by *Heartbreak House* and Sir James Barrie by *The Admirable Crichton.*

These two authors would, it should be noted, be represented by one play each. The method of this anthology has been first to select authors who are standard-bearers in the modern British dramatic movement, and second to isolate from the works of each selected author the play exhibiting him at his most significant. There is thus presented in this volume not indeed the whole, but a weighty proportion of the evidence on which opinion relies when it asserts that there have been two great periods of British drama—the Elizabethan and that of the present day. Other authors and other plays might have been included, and the evidence might or might not have gained strength by their inclusion; but within the covers of this book is the presentation of a case for Modern British Drama.

The case, as such, is inevitably prejudged: the evidence has hitherto been widely scattered and only adventitiously available. Nobody at this time of day doubts that from the nineties onward, during a period which Mr Bernard Shaw bestrode like a Colossus, British drama has manifested a virility and versatility which, after its long sleep from Sheridan to Robertson, has to be seen in order to be believed.

Seeing is believing, of course, but the great plays of the English repertory are rarely to be seen, be they classical or modern. The right place for a play is the theatre, and one would raise no objection to the headlong rush of the commercial theatre in search of masterpieces —mostly of box-office attractiveness, but occasionally of dramatic

art—if only we possessed a Comédie Française—a home for discovered masterpieces. For our masterpieces, if not lost, frequently go astray. The repertory theatres at Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol, Plymouth, and Hull do, indeed, provide local mitigations, and few great plays suffer total eclipse. Amateur actors, never so numerous or so rationally adventurous as they are to-day, shirk few masterpieces. But the capital dominates England. London, more visibly living for the day than any other part of the country, has a short memory; and there is no theatre in London which plays night by night and year by year a repertory of British masterpieces. We are rich in masterpieces, but we are not so rich that we can afford to neglect or forget them.

The more reason, then, for this anthology. If the plays of the modern era, since Tom Robertson played the Fairy Prince and woke the Sleeping Princess from her (nearly) hundred years of coma, are not readily, continually, and exultantly to be seen in night-by-night rotation, they can at least be read. Nineteen of them are here made handily accessible to the reader, who, whether he be a student of drama, an intending actor, or merely a seeker after the pleasures of books, will find in one volume a microcosm of those sure glories of artistic accomplishment which have made the names of British authors illustrious upon the playbills of the world.

It has come to pass that France, final citadel of the self-consciously national in art (and one does not refer only to the English-speaking theatre in Paris), has surrendered to British authors; while Germany, after adopting Shaw as it once adopted Shakespeare, has taken solidly to Galsworthy and to post-War authors like Lonsdale and Coward. As for America, that goes without saying; but it may be mentioned, in passing, that there are British authors like Harold Brighouse, Somerset Maugham, and Noel Coward who have actually had plays produced in the United States before they had been seen in England. Ours is, decidedly, not a home-keeping drama—exported British goods include plays.

The prevalence of comedy in this collection will be observed; and comedy is, in fact, the characteristic type of modern drama. The reason for this is a problem for speculation, but it may be suggested that the typical English creators are comic writers, and that from Falstaff to Micawber the great figures of our drama and our fiction have been comic characters. That does not mean that Falstaff is greater than Lear, but merely that he is in the direct line of the comic tradition of English authorship, from *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle* to, let us say, 'Liza Dolittle and Rummy Mitchens. Ben Jonson's title *Every Man in his Humour* might be used as a generic description for the greater part of English drama. Even Elizabethan tragedy, the grandest vehicle of the rhetorical theatre, was tempered

in its own day by the comedies of Shakespeare and Jonson, and while the Restoration writers essayed tragedy it is not, for example, for *The Mourning Bride* that we remember Congreve, except to deride him.

The Englishman, if a generalization may be allowed, has a laughing mind and is an amateur of humour. The French call us a frivolous nation, meaning that we carry trouble lightly. When the English were intolerably troubled, when they were stirred by war to the depths of their profound sincerity, they sang bawdy verses to the tune of *Tipperary*, and the symbol of the trenches which they nationally adopted was nothing more heroical than the optimistic grotesque, "'Ole Bill.' No wonder that the English, as playgoers, dislike Racine; no wonder that after the War they found in music not more serious than that of Sullivan and in *libretti* as satirical as those of Gilbert the accepted expression in the theatre of the English spirit.

Tragedy, rightly or wrongly, is suspected of both rhodomontade and ritual. The explanation suggested for the decline of tragedy, that modern nerves revolt from harrowing emotion, will not hold water. The most brutal assaults upon the emotions are made by 'crook' or crime plays, and the Fat Boys of the drama have grown fatter by making our flesh creep. But these are not serious plays, and the modern Englishman, confronted by a play which proposes to be tragic, sets stronger guard upon his receptivity than he does when he perceives that a comic writer proposes to laugh him out of some of his bad manners.

It must not be inferred, however, that tragedy does not exist; still less that it does not remain the most potent of the many magics of the theatre. If *Justice* be excepted, of what modern English play can it be said that it has accomplished a social reform? And even *Justice* is informal tragedy; for if *Justice* had been written in verse it would probably have achieved nothing, not even an audience.

A point may here be scored for the modern drama as against the modern novel. No novelist since Dickens can be cited as definite cause of a specific social reform. The playwright Galsworthy can; the playwright Shaw has been writing the *Intelligent Playgoer's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism* ever since he began with *Widowers' Houses*. Shaw, more than any single man, made the Labour Party—in spite of which his plays are magnificent; if they contain propaganda they transcend it. And Shaw invented Modern Woman thirty years before she invented herself.

Modern thinkers, indubitably, prefer drama as the medium for expressing their views; and here, at once, the point which seemed to have been scored for drama is open to objection and attack. "All art is quite useless," wrote Oscar Wilde in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; therefore a propagandist drama is not really art.

But the word 'propagandist' is extreme; the word 'sociological' is better, and since drama necessarily reflects its age, and since this is, after Marx and Darwin, an age of questioning about social systems and faith, it was inevitable that drama, without being a self-conscious drama of revolt, should ask questions and suggest possible answers. Thus far, but no farther than that, is the drama of our own age to be called propagandist. No drama which is not given up to frivolity can escape the charge of propagandism. A serious playwright is a man with a point of view. It is bad art to permit the point of view to obtrude; but a sociological drama is not bad art when it indicates that there are two sides to a sociological question.

"In the past," wrote Mr G. H. Mair, in 1911, "it has seemed impossible for fiction and serious drama to flourish side by side. It seems as though the best creative minds in any age could find strength for only one of these two great outlets for the activity of the creative imagination. In the reign of Elizabeth the drama outshone fiction; in the reign of Victoria the novel crowded out the drama. There are signs that a literary era is commencing in which the drama will again regain to the full its position as literature. More and more the bigger creative artists will turn to a form which by its economy of means to ends, and the chance it gives not merely of observing but of creating and displaying character in action, has a more vigorous principle of life in it than its rival."

Modern post-War comedy appears to be more concerned with effects than with causes. Ibsen's Nora walked out and banged the door; Mr Noel Coward's women seem to show that she found nothing outside the door. There is no suggestion made that she should return to the Doll's House, but the question raised is whether the emancipation of women means nothing but freedom to drink cocktails and to commit adultery. Modern playwrights are certainly bothered by the modern woman; they are bothered inordinately by a type of modern woman who peoples our stages more than she peoples life. "The adventures of innocence," as Henry James said, "are not interesting." But, seized as women are by some of our modern playwrights in their stage of transition from the Doll's House to the unknown future, they are not, in cocktail plays, pleasing animals. In life, one believes, they are less stridently modern, both in word and action, than in modern comedy; but "art is the exaggeration of life," and the comic writers of the cocktail school may plausibly be held, in exhibiting bad manners at their worst, to be propagandists of good manners.

But, of course, the one serious message of post-War drama is that war is hell, and doubtless vastly more plays preaching "No more war" are written than are produced. The method is either to attempt, naturalistically, to portray the recent war, or imaginatively to forecast

the still greater horrors of the next. The theme is capable of many variations, and neither the English examples, like the deeply impressive *Journey's End*, for instance, nor the linguistic and other realism of the American play *What Price Glory?* nor the French psychological reduction to the simple three—the soldier, the wife, and the old man—in *The Unknown Warrior*, can be supposed to have exhausted the reactions of drama to abhorrence of war.

Such plays have underlying propagandist motive. We are too near the War as yet to be able to use it merely as the background before which character is evolved; and it cannot be said of any anti-war play that it has created memorable characters. That is not its business; nor is it the business of 'expressionist' drama, which attempts to deal with tendencies rather than with men, with masses, not with individuals.

But ought drama to deal with character? one may ask. The answer is emphatically affirmative. Tragic character is the exceptional, comic character the typical; character, and character only, is the residuary basis of drama. That is why there is a real case against the playwright who is consciously propagandist, because of the almost irresistible temptation to distort character in the interest of the argument. It is not the business of an advocate to see things whole, and the playwright with a purpose is liable to put his message first and veracity in character-drawing second. A play should prove nothing: it should give a faithful picture of life.

Each playwright has, admittedly, his own vision of life; no one but himself has his eye, and he is biased just so far as he sees, and no farther. The picture of life is uniquely his.

"The drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything," wrote J. M. Synge in his preface to *The Tinker's Wedding*. "Analysts with their problems, and teachers with their systems, are soon as old-fashioned as the pharmacopœia of Galen—look at Ibsen and the Germans—but the best plays of Ben Jonson and Molière can no more go out of fashion than the blackberries on the hedges." It is noteworthy that Synge should instance Ben Jonson's plays—of 'humours,' of comic character—and that he should go on to say that "Of the things which nourish the imagination, humour is the most needful."

Ben Jonson may rightly be called the father of English comedy, as Fielding of the English novel. It was his ambition to make the theatre a medium for the expression of

> Deeds, and language, such as men do use,
> And persons, such as comedy would choose,
> When she would show an image of the times,
> And sport with human follies, not with crimes.

A word should be said about the arrangement of the plays in this volume. They are, roughly, in chronological order; but in certain

cases where there seemed to be an advantage in doing so—as, for example, to avoid placing two similar plays together, or to secure greater interest by immediate juxtaposition—the editor has deliberately changed the order of presentation. *Milestones* was given the first place because its title and theme have a significance for a book which attempts to indicate the milestones of dramatic development in this country during the last half-century; *Outward Bound* was put last not because it is the latest play in the collection, but because its title and theme seem to be symbolic of the unfinished life of British drama.

J. W. M.

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# MILESTONES

## By ARNOLD BENNETT & EDWARD KNOBLOCK

*First produced at the Royalty Theatre, London, March 5, 1912*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

| | |
|---|---|
| John Rhead | Nancy Sibley |
| Gertrude Rhead | Lord Monkhurst |
| Mrs Rhead | The Honourable Muriel Pym |
| Samuel Sibley | Richard Sibley |
| Rose Sibley | Thompson |
| Ned Pym | Webster |
| Emily Rhead | Footman |
| Arthur Preece | |

*The scene is laid throughout in the drawing-room of a house in Kensington Gore.*

*The First Act is in* 1860.
*The Second Act is in* 1885.
*The Third Act is in* 1912.

ON the flyleaf of any recent book by Mr Arnold Bennett the list of his works appears in small type because it could not otherwise be conveniently printed on a single page. The author of *The Old Wives' Tale* is prolific; of plays alone, single-handed or with Mr Edward Knoblock, the number is considerable. The suggestion may be made that, successful as Mr Bennett is with men who are millionaires, he is still more successful with women who are middle-class—with Constance and Sophia Baines and Hilda Lessways of the novels, with Gertrude Rhead, Emily Vernon, and Janet Cannot of the plays. *The Great Adventure* of the whimsically shy artist and the simply sane woman is the most popular of Mr Bennett's single-handed plays, but there are those who prefer the play of Fleet Street and the Five Towns, *What the Public Wants*, deeming it the richer of the two in colour, contrast, and raciness of characterization. Nor should his first play, *Cupid and Commonsense*, be ignored; on the contrary, the drama of the English provinces may well be the poorer because Mr Bennett in

his later plays elected against the Potteries, except in the opening of *Sacred and Profane Love*. *The Title* and *The Honeymoon* are amusing, but neither these nor the plays about Judith and Don Juan de Marana, nor the satirical *The Bright Island*, have authority to equal that commanded by the Five Towns plays or by *The Great Adventure*.

His collaboration with Mr Knoblock resulted in the great three-period comedy of manners *Milestones*, and in two minor works, *London Life* and *Mr Preback*. The method pursued in writing *Milestones* is understood to have been general consultation, with *Punch* volumes of appropriate years for historical arbiter, play-construction entirely by Mr Knoblock, and dialogue entirely by Mr Bennett.

Mr Edward Knoblock, born an American, became a British subject during the War. The unwritten truth about his Secret Service experiences is said to be startling. He is the author of *Kismet*, an ably constructed Arabian Nights drama, *My Lady's Dress*, linking together by a quarrel scene and a dream a series of uncommonly vivid one-act plays, commenting on the human toil and passion which can go to the making of a ball-dress, *Marie-Odile*, and other plays, including a Cockney musical comedy.

*Milestones*, in costume and furnishing, has pictorial values; it is perhaps natural to find—certainly it is interesting to note—that both collaborators have written directly for the films, Mr Knoblock for Mr Fairbanks, Mr Bennett for a British company.

# ACT I

## 1860

*The scene represents the drawing-room of a house in Kensington Gore. The house is quite new at the time: all the decorations, pictures, and furniture are of the mid-Victorian period. On the left*[1] *three long windows look out on Kensington Gardens. On the right a large double door leads into the back drawing-room. A single door on the same side of the room leads to the hall and stairs. In the centre at back a large fireplace with a fire burning in it. The blinds and curtains are drawn; the lamps are lighted.*

*It is about half-past nine at night of the 29th of December,* 1860.

Mrs Rhead, *a woman of nearly sixty, is sitting on the sofa, crocheting some lace, which is evidently destined to trim petticoats. Her hair is dressed in the style of* 1840, *though her dress is of the* 1860 *period. Near her, in an armchair, sits* Rose Sibley, *a gentle, romantic-looking girl of twenty-one, who is dressed in the height of fashion of the period. She is at work on a canvas wool-work pattern. Cups of after-dinner coffee stand near both ladies.*

Mrs Rhead. Do permit me to look at your work one moment, my dear Rose.

Rose. With pleasure, Mrs Rhead.

Mrs Rhead. Very pretty indeed. Nothing could be in better taste than these Berlin wool patterns.

Rose. I got the design from the *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. It's to be one of three cushions for Father's study.

Mrs Rhead. I had an idea of doing the same sort of thing for my husband, after we moved into the new house here, three years ago. But, then, when he died I hadn't the heart to go on. So I'm crocheting lace now instead for Gertrude's *trousseau*. Will you have some more coffee?

Rose. No, thank you.

Mrs Rhead. Just a drop. Gertrude, pour out—— [*She looks about.*] Now where has Gertrude disappeared to?

Rose. She left the room some moments ago.

Mrs Rhead. Even between dinner and coffee she must be off.

The acting rights of this play are reserved. Applications for permission to perform should be made to Messrs J. B. Pinker and Sons, Talbot House, Arundel Street, Strand, London, W.C.2.

[1] 'Right' and 'left' are from the point of view of the actor.

ROSE. But why?

MRS RHEAD. Do I know, my dear? Just managing the house, and managing it, and managing it. Upon my word, Gertrude performs the duties of the place as if it were the foundry and she were John. My son and daughter are so alike.

ROSE [*interjecting enthusiastically*]. One's as splendid as the other.

MRS RHEAD. She keeps account-books now.

ROSE [*rather startled*]. Of the house?

MRS RHEAD [*nods*]. And she says she shall show John a balance-sheet at quarter-day. Did you ever hear of such behaviour?

ROSE. She always was very active, wasn't she? It's in the blood.

MRS RHEAD. It is not in mine, and I am her mother. No! It is all due to these modern ways; that is what it is.

ROSE. I suppose John's rather pleased.

MRS RHEAD. Yes, John! But what about *your* brother? Will he be pleased? Is Gertrude going to make him the wife his position demands?

ROSE. I'm sure he'll be delighted to have his house managed as this one's managed.

MRS RHEAD. But will it stop at that? Once one begins these modern ways, one never knows where they will end.

ROSE. I must say I was surprised she ever accepted Sam.

MRS RHEAD [*deprecatingly*]. Surprised? But why?

ROSE. We Sibleys are such an extremely old-fashioned family. Look at Father! And I do believe Sam's worse. Yes, I do believe Sam's worse than Father. Thank goodness they have your son for a partner—two such slow-coaches, as they are.

MRS RHEAD. Slow-coaches! My dear, remember the respect due to your father.

ROSE [*eagerly*]. Oh, I adore Father, and Sam too! I wouldn't have either of them altered for the world. But I do think Sam's very fortunate in getting Gertrude.

MRS RHEAD. She is also very fortunate, very fortunate indeed. I have the highest respect for Sam's character, and my hope and prayer is that he and Gertrude will influence each other for nothing but good. But, between you and me, my dear, the first six months will be—well—lively, to say the least.

[GERTRUDE RHEAD *enters by the door from the hall, carrying in her hand a cloak of the latest pattern of the period. She is twenty-one, high-spirited, independent, afraid of no one.*

ROSE. What on earth's that, Gertrude?

GERTRUDE. I've just been upstairs to get it. Help me, will you? I wanted to show it you. [ROSE *helps* GERTRUDE *with the cloak.* I only bought it to-day, with the money John gave me for Christmas. Thank you—well?

ROSE. Very daring, isn't it? I suppose it's quite the latest?

GERTRUDE. Next year's. Mother says it's "fast."

MRS RHEAD. I hope you'll put it away before the men come up.

GERTRUDE [*with assumed innocence*]. Why?

MRS RHEAD. Because Samuel will surely not approve of it.

GERTRUDE. I bet you he will.

MRS RHEAD. Gertrude!

GERTRUDE. The truth is, Rose, Mother's only taken a prejudice against it because I brought it home myself this afternoon in a hansom cab.

ROSE [*staggered*]. Alone? In a hansom cab?

MRS RHEAD. You may well be shocked, dear. My lady refuses the carriage, because of keeping the horses standing in this terrible frost. And then she actually hails a hansom-cabriolet! What Samuel would say if he knew I dare not imagine.

GERTRUDE. Well, what harm is there in it, Mamma darling? [*Caresses her.*] I do wish you'd remember we're in the year 1860—and very near sixty-one. You really must try to keep up with the times. Why, girls will be riding on the tops of omnibuses some day.

ROSE [*protesting*]. Gertrude!

MRS RHEAD. I hope I shan't live to see it.

[*Enter* THOMPSON, *a young butler, from the hall. He collects the coffee-cups, putting them all on a tray.*

GERTRUDE. Is the hot-water apparatus working properly, Thompson?

THOMPSON. Moderate, miss.

GERTRUDE [*rather annoyed*]. It ought to work perfectly.

ROSE. What's the hot-water apparatus?

GERTRUDE. It's for the bathroom, you know.

ROSE. Yes. I knew you'd got a bathroom.

GERTRUDE. It's just the latest device. John had it put in the week Mother was down at Brighton. It was his Christmas surprise for her.

ROSE. Yes, but I don't understand.

GERTRUDE. It's quite simple. We have a boiler behind the kitchen range, and pipes carry the hot water up to the bath. There's one tap for hot and another for cold.

ROSE. How wonderful!

GERTRUDE. So when you want a hot bath all you have to do——

MRS RHEAD [*drily*]. All we have to do is to tell cook to put down a shoulder of mutton to roast. Very modern!

GERTRUDE [*caressing her mother again*]. Horrid old dear! Thompson, why is it working only moderately?

THOMPSON [*by the door*]. No doubt because cook had orders that the beef was to be slightly underdone, miss. [*Exit quickly with tray.*

GERTRUDE [*to* ROSE]. That was to please your carnivorous daddy, Rose, and he never came.

MRS RHEAD. I do hope there's been no trouble down at the foundry between him and my son.

ROSE. So do I.

GERTRUDE. Why are you both pretending? You know perfectly well there has been trouble between them. You must have noticed the chilliness when our respective brothers met to-night.

ROSE. I assure you, Gertrude, I know *nothing*. Sam said not a single word in the carriage.

GERTRUDE. Well, wasn't that enough? Or does he never speak in the carriage?

ROSE [*to* MRS RHEAD]. Has John said anything?

MRS RHEAD. I understood you to say that the reason your father didn't come to dinner was that he had an urgent appointment, quite unexpectedly, at the last moment.

ROSE. Yes, he asked me to tell you and make his excuses.

GERTRUDE. Urgent appointment at his club—most likely!

MRS RHEAD. I wonder what the trouble can have been.

GERTRUDE. You don't, Mother. You know! It's the old story—Sam and his father with their set ideas, pulling one way; and John with his go-ahead schemes pulling the other—with the result——

MRS RHEAD. The result is that we've had one of the most mournful dinners to-night that I have ever had the pleasure of giving.

GERTRUDE. I know! What a good thing we asked Ned Pym. If he hadn't come to the rescue with his usual facetious, senseless chatter I do believe Sam and John——

MRS RHEAD [*quickly stopping her*]. Here are the gentlemen! Gertrude, take that cloak off.

[*Enter from the hall* SAMUEL SIBLEY, NED PYM, *and* JOHN RHEAD. SAMUEL SIBLEY *is twenty-eight, heavy, with a serious face, a trifle pompous, but with distinct dignity.* NED PYM, *who is a little over twenty, is the young dandy of the day; handsome, tall, with excellent manners, which allow him to carry off his facetious attitude rather successfully.* JOHN RHEAD *comes last. He is twenty-five, full of determination and purpose. He knows what he wants and is going to get it.*

MRS RHEAD [*in a smooth tone to* ROSE]. Have you seen the new number of *Great Expectations*, dear?

NED. What's this, Gertrude? Charades?

GERTRUDE [*flouncing her cloak half defiantly at* SAM]. Paris!

NED [*coming between* SAM *and* GERTRUDE]. Evidently it has lost nothing on the journey over.

GERTRUDE. Ned, would you mind . . . I'm showing it to Sam. [*To* SAM] Don't you like it?

SAM [*forcing himself*]. On my betrothed, yes.

NED [*facetiously*]. By the exercise of extreme self-control the lover conceals his enthusiasm for the cloak of his mistress.

GERTRUDE [*appealing to* SAM]. But you do like it—don't you?

SAM [*evasively*]. Isn't it rather original?

GERTRUDE. Of course it is. That's just the point.

SAM [*surprised*]. Just the point?

GERTRUDE [*taking the cloak off and flinging it half pettishly on a chair*]. Oh!

JOHN. It's original, and therefore it has committed a crime. [*Looking at* SAM] Isn't that it, Sam?

SAM [*gives* JOHN *a look and turns to* MRS RHEAD *with an obvious intention of changing the conversation*]. What were you saying about *Great Expectations*, Mrs Rhead?

MRS RHEAD [*at a loss*]. What *were* we saying about *Great Expectations*?

NED. Well, I can tell you one thing about it; it's made my expectations from my uncle smaller than ever. [*He sits by* MRS RHEAD.

MRS RHEAD. Oh, how is dear Lord Monkhurst?

NED. He's very well and quarrelsome, thank you. And his two sons, my delightful cousins, are also in excellent health. Well, as I was going to tell you; you know how my uncle has turned against Dickens since *Little Dorrit*. I happened to say something about *Great Expectations* being pretty fairish, and he up and rode over me like a troop of cavalry.

MRS RHEAD [*puzzled*]. A troop of cavalry?

NED. It was at his Christmas party, too, worse luck. He as good as told me I disagreed with him on purpose to annoy him. Now I cannot agree with him solely and simply because he allows me seven hundred a year, can I?

ROSE. Is he so difficult to get on with?

NED. Difficult? He's nothing but a faddist! An absolute old faddist! What can you do with a man that's convinced that spirits'll turn his dining-table, and that Bacon wrote Shakespeare; and that the Benicia Boy's a better man than Tom Sayers?

MRS RHEAD. It seems a great pity you cannot do something to please your uncle.

NED. Would you believe it? He even wanted me to join the Rifle Volunteers. Now, I ask you, can you see me in the Rifle Volunteers, me among a lot of stockbrokers and chimney-sweeps?

GERTRUDE. We cannot, Ned.

NED. And in order to raise my patriotism last night—— [*Slapping*

*his knee violently*] By Jove! [*He jumps up.*] By heavens! Jiggered! Jiggered!

GERTRUDE *and* ROSE. Ned!

NED. I am a ruined man! You see before you, kind friends, a man ruined and without hope! Last night my uncle sent me a ticket for the launching of the *Warrior*.

SAM [*with a sneer*]. The *Warrior*! You didn't miss much!

NED. But my beloved aunt was commanded to be in attendance on her Royal Highness at the said function. . . . Well, I forgot all about it. I repeat I forgot all about it. My uncle will certainly call this the last straw. There will be no quarterly cheque for me on New Year's Day.

ROSE. What *is* the *Warrior*?

JOHN [*bursting out*]. The *Warrior* is a steam-frigate—first vessel of the British Navy to be built entirely of iron. She's over six thousand tons burden, and she represents the beginning of a new era in iron.

ROSE [*adoringly*]. How splendid!

JOHN [*responding quickly to her mood*]. Ah, you agree with me!

ROSE [*enthusiastically*]. Of course! [*She breaks off self-consciously.*] Of course I agree with you.

JOHN [*after a slight pause—quickly*]. This 29th of December marks a great day in the history of the British Navy.

SAM [*with a slight superior smile, trying to be gay*]. Nonsense. All this day marks is the folly of the Admiralty. You may take it as an absolute rule that whatever the Admiralty does is wrong. Always has been, always will be. The *Great Eastern* was the champ on white elephant of the age. And now the *Warrior* has gone her one better.

JOHN. Sam, you don't know what you're saying. How can you talk about the *Warrior* when you've never even so much as laid eyes on the ship?

SAM. Well, have *you*?

JOHN. Yes—I went to the launch to-day.

SAM. You?

MRS RHEAD. Why did you go, John? You never said a word to me.

JOHN. I went on business.

SAM. You told me you had an appointment with the bank.

JOHN. I only said that because I couldn't stop to argue just then.

SAM. So you said what wasn't so.

JOHN. I said what was necessary at the moment. I wasn't going to leave you in the dark; never fear.

SAM [*curtly controlling himself*]. I see. [*A slight pause, then* SAM *turns abruptly to* GERTRUDE *and says gently*] Come and sing, dear. I haven't heard you sing for over a fortnight.

GERTRUDE [*moved by the quarrel—after a pause in a low voice*]. What shall I sing?

SAM. Sing *'Nita, Juanita.*

GERTRUDE. No! I heard Madame Sainton Dolby sing it last week.

SAM. Do!—to please me.

[GERTRUDE *turns towards the double doors and goes off in silence with* SAM.

[NED *is about to follow instantly, but* MRS RHEAD *stops him.*

MRS RHEAD [*whispering*]. Give them just one instant alone.

NED. I beg pardon. My innocence at fault. [*The song is heard.* [*A pause.*] Is that long enough?

[MRS RHEAD *taps him, then she goes off after the others, followed by* NED.

[*A slight pause.*

ROSE [*moving towards the doors*]. What a lovely voice she has!

JOHN [*abruptly, closing the doors*]. I want to talk to you.

ROSE [*nervous and self-conscious*]. To me?

JOHN. I wish I'd asked you to come to that launch.

ROSE. Where was it?

JOHN. At Greenhithe; only two stations beyond the foundry. Would you have come?

ROSE. I should have loved to . . . if Gertrude had come too.

JOHN [*musing*]. You should have seen her go into the water—the wave she made? All that iron—and rivets! Iron, mind you. . . . And then float like a cork. I never was at a launch before, and it gave me a thrill, I can tell you. And I'm not easily thrilled.

ROSE [*adoringly, but restraining herself*]. I'm sure you're not. I do wish I'd seen it. It must have been almost sublime.

JOHN. You'd have understood. You'd have felt like I did. Do you know how I know that?

ROSE [*shaking her head*]. No——

JOHN. By the way you said "How splendid!" when I was telling the others just now.

ROSE. Really!

JOHN. Fact! That gave me more encouragement in my schemes than any words I ever heard.

ROSE. Please don't say that. Gertrude is always on your side. She's so like you in every way.

JOHN. Yes, Gertrude's all right. But she's got no poetry in her, Gertrude hasn't. That's the difference between you and her. She's very go-ahead; but she doesn't feel. You feel.

ROSE [*breathless*]. Do I, John? [*She looks down.*

JOHN. I'll tell you something—tears came into my eyes when that frigate took the water. Couldn't help it! [ROSE *raises her eyes to his.*]

In thirty years every big ship in the world will be built of iron. Very few people to-day believe in iron for shipbuilding, and I know there's a lot of silly, easy sarcasm about it—especially in the papers. But it's coming! It's coming!

ROSE [*religiously*]. I'm sure you're right.

JOHN. If only your father and your brother thought as you do!

ROSE [*faintly*]. Yes.

JOHN. I'm in the minority, you see; two partners against one. If my father had lived, I know which side *he'd* have been on! I shouldn't have been in the minority then.

ROSE. You'd have been equal.

JOHN [*enthusiastically*]. No! We should certainly have rolled your excellent father and brother straight into the Thames!

ROSE [*amiably protesting*]. Please——

JOHN [*smiling*]. Forgive me—you know what I mean, don't you?

ROSE. I love to see you when you are enthusiastic!

JOHN. It's so plain. We've got probably the largest iron foundry on Thames-side. But our business isn't increasing as quickly as it used to do. It can't. We've come to about the limit of expansion on present lines. Shipbuilding is simply waiting for us. There it is—asking to be picked up! We're *in* iron. We know all about iron. The ships of the future will be built of nothing but iron. And we're right in the middle of the largest port in the world. What more can anyone want? But no! They won't see it! They—will—not—see—it!

ROSE. I wonder why they won't!

JOHN. Simply because they can't.

ROSE. Then one oughtn't to blame them.

JOHN. Blame them! Good heavens, no! I don't blame them. I'm fond of them, and I rather feel for them. But that's just why I want to smash them to smithereens! They've got to yield. The people who live in the past *must* yield to the people who live in the future. Otherwise, the earth would begin to turn the other way round, and we should be back again in the eighteenth century before we knew where we were, making for the Middle Ages.

ROSE. Then you think a conflict is unavoidable?

JOHN. Absolutely unavoidable! That's the point. It's getting nearer every hour. . . . Why is your father not here to-night?

ROSE. I don't know, but I was afraid——

JOHN. *I* know and Sam knows. It must be because he has heard somehow of an enterprise I am planning, and the news has upset him. He's vexed.

ROSE. Poor dear old thing! Then you've started a scheme already?

JOHN [*nods*]. I have. But I can't carry it out alone.

ROSE. If there is one man in the world who could stand alone, I should have said you were that man.

JOHN. I know. That's the impression I give. And yet nobody ever needed help more than I do. I'm not all on the surface, you know.

ROSE. What sort of help?

JOHN. Sympathy—understanding.

ROSE [*low*]. I see.

JOHN. Of course you see! And that's why I suddenly decided I must have a bit of a chat with you—this very night. It's forced on me. And I feel I'm rather forcing it on you. But I can't help it—honestly I can't. Rose, you're on my side, aren't you?

ROSE. I believe you're in the right.

JOHN. Would you like to see me win—[*silence*]—or lose?

ROSE. I don't think I could bear to see you beaten.

JOHN. Well, then, help me! When you look at me with that trustful look of yours I can do anything—anything. No other woman's eyes ever had the same effect on me. It's only because you believe in me. No, that isn't the only reason: it isn't the chief reason. The chief reason is that I'm in love with you—there you have it!

ROSE [*sinking her head*]. Oh——!

JOHN [*coming to her*]. Curious! I've known you all my life. But I wasn't aware of all that you meant to me, until these difficulties began. You're essential to me. You can't imagine how much depends on just you!

ROSE. Really?

JOHN. You're too modest, too womanly to realize it. Why, sometimes a tone of yours, a mere inflection, almost knocks me over—— You aren't crying, surely? What are you crying for?

ROSE. It's too much for me, coming like this, with no warning.

JOHN. Rose, be mine! I'll work for you, I'll succeed for you. No woman in this country shall have a finer position than yours.

ROSE. I don't want a fine position—except for you.

JOHN. I'm not hard, really.

ROSE. But I like you to be hard. It's when you're inflexible and brutal that I like you the most.

JOHN. Then you do like me a little—sometimes? [*Kisses her hands.*

ROSE. I can't help telling you. I didn't hope for this. Yes, I did. But the hope seemed absurd. Is this real—now?

JOHN. My love!

ROSE. John, you say I don't realize how much I mean to you. Perhaps I do, though. But it's impossible for *you* to realize how I want to give my life to you, to serve you. No *man* could realize that. A woman could. I shall be your slave. [JOHN *looks at her with a little*

*start.*] Yes, I know it sounds queer for me to be talking like this. But I must. It thrills me to tell you . . . I shall be your slave.

JOHN. Don't make me afraid, my darling!

ROSE. Afraid?

JOHN. Afraid of being unworthy.

ROSE. Please. . . . [*A slight pause.*] Has the singing stopped?

JOHN. A long time ago.

ROSE. They'll be coming in, perhaps.

JOHN [*vaguely, without conviction*]. No.

ROSE. What will your mother and Gertrude say?

JOHN. You know as well as I do, they'll be absolutely delighted.

ROSE. And Father?

JOHN [*alertly*]. Rose, you're mine, whatever happens?

ROSE. Oh, nothing must happen now! Nothing shall happen!

JOHN. But suppose I couldn't carry out my scheme without quarrelling with your father? And he refused his consent to our being married?

ROSE. My heart would be yours for ever and ever. But I couldn't marry without Father's consent.

JOHN. But——

ROSE. I couldn't——

JOHN. Why not?

ROSE. It would not be right.

JOHN. But you love me?

ROSE. Yes, but I love Father too. And he's getting very old. And he's very dependent on me. In any case to give me up would be a great sacrifice to him. To lose me against his will—well, I don't know what would happen!

JOHN. As things are just now—he's bound to refuse.

ROSE. But are you so sure he won't have anything to do with your scheme?

JOHN. You heard Sam!

ROSE. Yes; but you haven't discussed your plans very thoroughly with Sam. He seemed quite surprised.

JOHN. Suppose I speak to Sam to-night; tell him everything. At any rate, I shall know then where I stand.

ROSE. To-night?

JOHN. Now! I *might* win him over. Anyhow, he'll do what he can to make things smooth for us with your father—surely! After all, he's engaged to Gertrude!

ROSE. Just as you think best. . . . And Sam's very fond of me, though he never shows it.

JOHN. Let me get it over now, instantly. Will you go in to the others?

[ROSE *looks at him in silence, then rises and goes to the double doors.*

[JOHN *stops her and solemnly and passionately kisses her, then opens the doors and she passes through.*

JOHN [*calling into the other room*]. I say, Sam! Mother, I want a word with Sam alone.

[SAMUEL *enters by the double doors.* JOHN *closes them behind him.*

SAM [*suspicious, and not over-friendly*]. What is it? Not business, I hope?

JOHN [*with a successful effort to be cordial*]. No, no!

SAM [*following* JOHN'S *lead, and to make conversation*]. I was wondering what you and Rose were palavering about.

JOHN. Samuel, you've gone right into the bull's eye at the first shot. I've just been through a very awkward moment.

SAM. Oh, I see! That's it, is it?

JOHN. I've made a proposal of marriage to my partner's sister. Startling, ain't it?

SAM. No! If you care to know, I was talking to your mother about it last week.

JOHN. About what?

SAM. About the betting odds—whether it was more likely to come off this year or next. Your mother was right, and I was wrong—by a couple of days.

JOHN [*startled*]. But you'd none of you the slightest ground. I've never shown—— Certainly Rose has never shown——

SAM [*teasingly*]. No, of course not. But you know how people *will* gossip and jump to conclusions, don't you? I know, I went through it myself, not very long ago either. I remember the clever way in which you all knew about it before I'd got half-way to the end of my first sentence.

JOHN. Sam, you're devilish funny.

SAM. Even the dullest old Tory is funny once in his life. Am I right in assuming that Rose did not unconditionally refuse your offer?

JOHN. She did me the honour to accept it.

SAM. I must confess I'm not entirely surprised that she didn't spurn you.

JOHN. All right, old cock. Keep it up. I don't mind. But when you're quite done, you might congratulate me.

SAM [*not effusively*]. I do, of course.

JOHN. I suppose you'll admit, even as a brother, that I'd have to go rather far before I met a woman with half Rose's qualities.

SAM. Yes, Rosie's all right. Of course she's cold; she hasn't got

what I call poetry in her. That's the difference between her and Gertrude.

JOHN [*facing him*]. Do you honestly think Rose has no poetry in her? Rose?

SAM. Easy does it, my tulip! Have it your own way!

JOHN [*good-humouredly*]. I suppose where sisters are concerned all brothers are alike.

SAM. Well, I'm looking at one. We're a pair.

JOHN. Shake! [*They shake hands*, SAM *rather perfunctorily*.] Now, Sam, I'm going to rely on you.

SAM. What for?

JOHN. I don't think you had any fault to find with my attitude towards your engagement, had you? I welcomed it with both arms. Well, I want you to do the same with me.

SAM. But, my dear fellow, I'm nobody in the affair. You're the head of a family; I'm not.

JOHN. But you have enormous influence with the head of a family, my boy.

SAM [*rather falsely*]. Why! Are you anticipating trouble with the Governor?

JOHN. I'm not anticipating it—but you know as well as I do—probably much better—that he ain't very friendly disposed this last day or two. The plain truth is—he's sulking. Now why? Nothing whatever has passed between us except just everyday business.

SAM. Well, the fact is, he suspects you're keeping something nasty up your sleeve for him.

JOHN. Has he told you?

SAM [*somewhat pugnaciously*]. Yes, he has.

JOHN. And what is it I'm supposed to have up my sleeve?

SAM. Look here, Jack. I'm not here to be cross-examined. If there's anything up your sleeve, you're the person to know what it is. It's not my sleeve we're talking about. Why don't you play with the cards on the table?

JOHN. I'm only too anxious to play with the cards on the table.

SAM. Then it is business you really wanted to talk about after all!

JOHN [*movement of irritation concealed*]. I expect your father's heard about me and Macleans, though how it's got abroad I can't imagine.

SAM. Macleans? Macleans of Greenhithe?

JOHN. Yes. That's what's worrying the old man, isn't it?

SAM. I don't know.

JOHN. He hasn't mentioned Macleans to you?

SAM. He has not. He isn't a great talker, you know. He merely said to me he suspected you were up to something.

JOHN. And what did you say?

SAM. Briefly, I said I thought you *were*. [*Disgustedly*] But, by gad! I never dreamed you were hobnobbing with the Maclean gang.

JOHN. Macleans are one of the oldest shipbuilding firms in the South of England. I went to the launch to-day with Andrew Maclean.

SAM. What's shipbuilding got to do with us?

JOHN. It's got nearly everything to do with us. Or it will have. Now listen, Sammy. I've arranged a provisional agreement for partnership between Macleans and ourselves.

SAM. You've——

JOHN. Half a minute. Macleans are rather flattered at the idea of a connection with the august firm of Sibley, Rhead and Sibley.

SAM. By God! I should think they were. [*Walks away.*

JOHN. They've had an output of over 25,000 tons this year. All wood. Naturally they want to go in for iron. They'll pay handsomely for our help and experience. In fact, I've got a draft agreement, my boy, that is simply all in our favour.

SAM. Did you seriously suppose——

JOHN. Let me finish. It's a brilliant agreement. In three years it'll mean the doubling of our business. And we shall have the satisfaction of being well established in the great industry of the future. Your father's old. I don't expect him to be very enthusiastic about a new scheme. But you're young, and you can influence him. He'll be retiring soon, and you and I will be together—just the two of us. We're marrying each other's sisters. And we shall divide an enormous fortune, my boy.

SAM. And have you had the impudence to try to make an agreement behind our backs?

JOHN [*controlling himself*]. I've made no agreement. I've only got the offer. It's open to you to refuse or accept. I only held my tongue about it so as to keep the job as easy as possible.

SAM. You had no right to approach anyone without consulting us.

JOHN. I was going to tell you to-morrow. But I guessed from your father's attitude these last two days that something had leaked out. That's why I'm telling you first, Sam—to-night. Come now, look at the thing calmly—reasonably. Don't condemn it offhand. A very great deal depends on your decision—more than you think.

SAM. I don't see that anything particular depends on my decision. If we refuse, we refuse. And we shall most decidedly refuse.

JOHN. But it's impossible you should be so blind to the future! Impossible!

SAM. See here, John! Don't you make the mistake of assuming that any man who doesn't happen to agree with you is a blind fool.

To begin with, it isn't polite. I know you *do* think we're blind, old-fashioned, brainless dolts, Father and I. We've both felt that for some time.

JOHN. I think you're blind to the future of iron ships, that's all.

SAM. Well, shall I tell you what we think of *you*? We think you've got a bee in your bonnet. That's all. We think you're a faddist in the style of Ned Pym's noble uncle!

JOHN [*his lips curling*]. Me like Lord Monkhurst! Ha!

SAM. Precisely. Don't you go and imagine that all the arguments are on one side. They aren't. Five-sixths of the experts in England have no belief whatever in the future of iron ships. You know that! Iron ships, indeed! And what about British oak? Would you build ships of the self-same material as bridges? Why not stone ships, then? Oh, yes, I know there's a number of faddists up and down the land—anything in the nature of a novelty is always bound to attract a certain type of brain. Unfortunately we happen to have that type of brain just now in the Cabinet. I quite agree with my father that the country is going to the dogs. Another Reform Bill this year! And actually an attempt to repeal the paper duty. But, of course, people who believe in iron ships would naturally want to unsettle the industrial classes by a poisonous flood of cheap newspapers! However, we've had enough common sense left to knock both those schemes on the head. And I've no doubt the sagacity of the country will soon also put an end to this fantastic notion of iron ships.

JOHN [*quietly*]. I see.

SAM. Oh, don't think I'm not fond of iron! Iron means as much to me as it does to you. But I flatter myself I can keep my balance. [*More quietly*] We didn't expect this of you, John, with your intellect.

JOHN [*as before*]. Very well.

SAM. I've made it clear, haven't I?

JOHN. Quite.

SAM. That's all right.

JOHN [*still quietly*]. Only I shall dissolve partnership.

SAM. Dissolve partnership? What for?

JOHN. I shall go on with Macleans alone.

SAM. You don't mean it.

JOHN. I mean every single word of it! [*He rises.*

[*They look at each other.*

SAM. Then I can tell you one thing. You won't marry Rosie.

JOHN. Why shan't I marry Rosie?

SAM. After such treachery.

JOHN [*raising his voice*]. Treachery! I merely keep my own opinion—I leave you to yours.

SAM. Do you think Father will let you drag Rose into the

fatuous scheme of yours? Do you think he'll give his daughter to a traitor?

JOHN [*sarcastic and cold*]. Don't get on stilts. [*Then suddenly bursting out*] And what has my marriage got to do with you? When I want your father's opinion, I'll go to your father for it.

SAM. Don't try to browbeat me, John. I know my father's mind, and what's more, you know I know it. And I repeat, my father will never let his daughter marry a——

JOHN [*shouting*]. Silence!

[*Enter* MRS RHEAD *by the double doors, followed by* NED PYM, GERTRUDE, *and* ROSE.

[*The women remain silent.*

NED [*facetiously coming forward*]. Why silence? Go on. We've only come in because we thought it might interest us. What's it all about? A hint will suffice.

JOHN. Ned, you're a blundering donkey, and you will be a blundering donkey to the end of your life.

NED. My one desire is to please.

GERTRUDE [*coming to* SAM, *in a quiet, firm tone*]. Sam, what's the matter?

SAM. Nothing! We must go! Rosie, get ready. [*Very respectfully to* MRS RHEAD] I'm sorry to break up the evening.

GERTRUDE. But you can't go like this.

SAM [*with deference*]. My dear Gertrude, please leave matters to your brother and me. You're a woman, and there are things——

GERTRUDE [*stopping him*]. It is possible I am a woman, but I'm a reasonable creature, and I intend to be treated as such.

MRS RHEAD [*very upset*]. My dear child, remember you are speaking to your future husband.

GERTRUDE. That's just why I'm speaking as I am. I ask Sam what's the matter—[*scornfully*]—and he says "Nothing." Am I a child? Are we all children?

SAM [*curtly*]. Come now, Rose.

GERTRUDE. And why must Rose go off like this? She's engaged to John.

SAM. Who told you?

GERTRUDE. Her eyes told me when she came out of this room.

MRS RHEAD. We all knew it, and no word said. We've been expecting it for weeks. [MRS RHEAD *and* ROSE *embrace.*

SAM. You are mistaken, Gertrude. Rose is not engaged to John, and she is not likely to be.

GERTRUDE. You object?

SAM. I do, and I know my father will.

GERTRUDE. You object to John for a brother-in-law? John!

Why?—You might at least condescend to tell Rosie, if not me. It's an affair that rather interests her, you see.

SAM. If you must know, John is going to leave our firm.

MRS RHEAD. John?

SAM. He thinks my father and I are old-fashioned, and so he's leaving us.

MRS RHEAD. John! Leave the firm? Surely you're not thinking of breaking up Rhead and Sibley?

SAM. Sibley, Rhead—and Sibley.

MRS RHEAD. It was Rhead and Sibley in my young days, when your father and John's were founding it. John, you cannot mean it!

SAM [*sarcastically*]. He's going to build iron ships.

GERTRUDE. And is that any reason why you should make poor Rosie unhappy and spoil her life?

SAM. I do not propose to argue.

GERTRUDE. The man who does not propose to argue with me is not going to be my husband.

MRS RHEAD. Gertrude!

GERTRUDE [*looking at* SAM]. I mean it. [SAM *bows.*

MRS RHEAD. Please don't listen to her, Sam.

SAM. All my apologies, Mrs Rhead.

GERTRUDE. And you, Rosie, what do you say to all this?

ROSE [*humbly and tearfully*]. I—I hardly understand. Sam, what is the matter?

JOHN [*coming to* ROSE]. It's quite simple. I believe in the future of iron ships and I have the courage of my convictions. Therefore you are not to be allowed to marry me. You see the connection is perfectly clear. But you shall marry me, all the same!

SAM [*confidently*]. You don't know my sister.

NED [*to* SAM, *facetiously*]. And you don't know John.

SAM [*turning to* NED, *firmly*]. Ned, go and order my carriage, there's a good fellow.

NED [*going off by the door into the hall*]. Oh, very well.

[*He closes the door behind him.*

MRS RHEAD. John, John, why are you so set in your own ideas? Everything was going perfectly smoothly. We were all so happy. And now you must needs fall out with your partners over iron ships. Do you prefer your iron ships to Rose's happiness and your own? *Is everything* to be sacrificed to iron ships?

JOHN. There need be no question of sacrifice, if——

SAM. If you can have it your own way. Of course. Mrs Rhead, your son wants to risk the ruin of all of us. Now, so far as we Sibleys are concerned, we won't allow him to do so. If he still persists in his purpose, very well, that's *his* look-out. Only—he can hardly be

urprised if Rose's family object—and very strongly—to letting him nake her his wife. One does not entrust one's daughter or one's sister o a traitor.

GERTRUDE. Sam, don't be childish.

SAM [*drawing himself up*]. I beg your pardon.

MRS RHEAD. John, I'm your mother. Listen to me. Give up this dea of yours. For my sake—for the sake of all of us.

JOHN. I cannot.

MRS RHEAD. But if it means so much unhappiness?

JOHN. I should be ashamed of myself if I gave it up. I believe in it. t's my religion.

MRS RHEAD. John, I beg you not to be profane.

JOHN [*a little quieter*]. I cannot give up my idea, Mother. I should e a coward to give it up. I should be miserable for the rest of my lays. I could never look anyone in the face, not even my wife.

[*Enter* NED *from the hall.*

NED [*to* SAM *in a flunkey's voice*]. Carriage is waiting, my lord.

SAM. Now, Rose! Good evening, Mrs Rhead.

GERTRUDE. Just a moment. [*Drawing a ring off her finger*] Ned! Hand this ring to Mr Sibley with my compliments.

NED. Must I?

GERTRUDE. Yes.

NED [*taking the ring*]. The donkey becomes a beast of burden. *Handing ring to* SAM] Sam, you get this, but you lose something that's worth a lot more.

SAM [*taking the ring*]. Of course I have no alternative.

ROSE. Good-bye, John.

MRS RHEAD. John, she's going. Will you let her?

JOHN [*rigidly*]. I cannot give up my idea.

SAM [*going into the hall as* ROSE *stands hesitating*]. Come along, child. 'm waiting.

ROSE [*moving a step towards* JOHN]. Stick to your idea! Let me go! love you all the more for it!

JOHN. Don't worry, Rose. The future is on our side.

ROSE [*looking straight at him*]. I——

[*Her emotion gets the better of her; she turns quickly and hurries from the room.*

GERTRUDE [*blankly, in spite of herself*]. The future!

[*She sinks down on a sofa and bursts into sobs.*

[JOHN *stands, looking after* ROSE.

# ACT II

## 1885

*The scene represents the same drawing-room as in Act I. But twenty-five years have passed. We are now in the year* 1885. *Consequently great changes have occurred. The furniture has been rearranged and added to. The flowered carpet of the first Act has given place to an Indian carpet. There are new ornaments amongst some of the old ones. The room is overcrowded with furniture in the taste of the period.*

*It is about four o'clock of an afternoon in June. The curtains are drawn back and the sun is shining brightly outside.*

Rose Sibley, *now* Mrs John Rhead, *forty-six years of age and dressed in the fashion of* 1885, *her hair slightly grey at the temples, is seated writing some notes at a desk near the windows.*

Ned Pym, *the new* Lord Monkhurst, *enters from the hall, followed by* John Rhead. *The former has developed into a well-preserved, florid, slightly self-sufficient man of about forty-five. The latter, now fifty, has not changed so much physically, except that his hair is grey and his features have become much firmer. But his manner has grown even more self-assured than it was in the first Act. He is in fact a person of authority; the successful man whose word is law.*

John. Oh, you *are* there, Rosie. I've brought a person of importance to see you.

Rose [*rising*]. Ned—— [*They shake hands.*

Ned. Now, please don't say what you were going to say.

Rose. And what was I going to say?

Ned. That I'm quite a stranger since I came into the title.

Rose [*curtseying and teasing*]. Lord Monkhurst, we are only too flattered—I was merely going to say that you look younger than ever.

Ned [*seriously*]. Don't I? That's what every one says. Time leaves me quite unchanged, don't you know.

John. In every way. How old *are* you, Ned?

Ned [*with a sigh*]. Well, I shall never see thirty again.

John. What about forty?

Ned. Or forty either. But my proud boast is I'm nearer forty than fifty.

John. Well, it can only be by a couple of months.

Ned. Sh!—It's a lot more than you say, Jack.

John. I was fifty in April. There's just five years' difference between us.

ROSE [*to* NED]. You look more like John's son.

NED. Say nephew; don't be too hard on him.

ROSE. But I do wish you would go out of mourning. It doesn't suit ou.

NED. Not these beautiful continuations?

ROSE. No!

NED. Well, I'm awfully sorry. But I can't oblige you yet. Please emember I've got three sudden deaths to work off. I think that when man loses a harsh but beloved uncle in a carriage accident, and two miable cousins through a misunderstanding about toadstools, all in welve months, why—[*gesture*]—the least he can do is to put himself nreservedly into the hands of his tailor.

ROSE. I——

JOHN [*stopping her, kindly but rather tyrannically*]. Now enough of his graceful badinage. Ned and I are here on business. What are you p to there, Rose?

ROSE [*with eager submissiveness*]. I was doing the invitations for the inner, or rather for the reception.

JOHN. Good. I've got some more names in my study. You'd better ome in there with me.

ROSE. Yes, love.

NED. Am I invited to this dinner? I generally get very hungry bout eight o'clock at nights.

ROSE [*teasing*]. Yes, I *think* I put you down. It's our wedding-day.

NED. Don't tell me how long you've been married. It would age ie!

ROSE. Considering that we have a daughter who is turned twenty-wo?

JOHN. Yes, Ned, you must face the facts bravely. Old Mr Sibley ied in January 1860——

ROSE. Sixty-one, love.

JOHN [*after a frown at being corrected*]. Sixty-one. And we were narried in June of the following year. Surely you recall the face Sam ulled when he gave my little Rosie away?

ROSE. But, love, it was a great concession for him to give me away t all, wasn't it?

JOHN. Oh, yes!

ROSE. By the bye, he's coming up to town this afternoon.

JOHN. What, here?

NED. Oh! But I ought to see old Sam.

ROSE. Stay for tea, and you'll see him and his wife too.

NED. His wife? His what did you say?

ROSE. Now, Ned, it's no use pretending you don't know all about it.

NED. I remember hearing a couple of years ago, before I went to

India, that Sam had staggered his counting-house by buying one of these new typewriting machines, and getting a young woman to work it for him.

ROSE. That's the person. Her name is Nancy.

NED. Is it? Only fancy, Nancy, Nancy in the counting-*house*! I say—are these girl-clerks or clerk-girls going to be a regular thing? What's coming over the world?

JOHN [*shakes his head*]. Passing craze! Goes with all this Votes for Women agitation and so on. You'll see, it won't last a year—not a year! Of course, Sam—susceptible bachelor of fifty and over—just the man to fall a victim. Inevitable!

ROSE. She's a very well-meaning, honest creature.

NED. You intimate with her, Rose?

ROSE. I went to see her several times after she had her baby. They're living at Brockley.

NED. Baby! Brockley! No more typewriting, then? The type writer has served its turn—eh? Of course it was a great catch for her.

JOHN. Yes, but it wouldn't have been if Samuel hadn't sold out.

NED. How much did he retire with, about?

JOHN. Well, you see he was losing three thousand a year. He got twenty thousand pounds net cash.

NED. I'm not a financier, but twenty thousand pounds cash in exchange for a loss of three thousand pounds a year doesn't seem too bad! Think of the money he'd have made, though, if he'd taken up with your ideas!

JOHN [*ironically*]. You recollect the folly of iron ships? And the bee in my bonnet? [*Laughs.*] There were only four wooden steamships built in this country last year. The rest were iron; and I was responsible for half a dozen of 'em.

NED. What's all this talk about steel for ships?

JOHN [*disdainfully*]. Just talk.

NED. Well, of course, if you're building at the rate of six steamers a year, I can understand your generosity in the matter of subscriptions.

ROSE. He *is* generous, isn't he?

NED. Told your wife about your latest contribution?

JOHN. No. I was just going to.

ROSE [*proudly*]. John tells me everything.

JOHN. And Rosie always approves, don't you, Rosie? Ah! The new generation can't show such wives.

ROSE [*eagerly*]. Well?

JOHN. I've decided to give ten thousand pounds to the party funds—politics, you know.

NED. You see, it's to save the country. That's what it amounts to practically, in these days. *I* know, since I've gone into politics.

ROSE. How noble! I'm so glad, John.

NED. And the great secret—shall I tell her, or will you, Jack?

JOHN. Go on.

NED. How should you like your husband to be a baronet, Rose?

ROSE. A baronet?

NED. Sir John Rhead, Bart., and Lady Rhead!

ROSE [*ecstatic*]. Is he going to be?

NED. As soon as our side comes into power—and we shall be in power in a month. John'll be on the next Honours List.

ROSE. In a month!

NED. The Budget's bound to be thrown out. They're trying to increase the taxes on beer and spirits—I've studied the question deeply. I know what will happen.

ROSE. How magnificent!

JOHN. Then you approve? [ROSE *kisses* JOHN *fondly*.] That's all we've called in for, just to make sure.

ROSE [*weeping*]. I——

JOHN. What's the matter?

ROSE. I'm only sorry we haven't had a son.

NED. There, there! I'm sure you did your best, Rose.

ROSE [*to* JOHN]. Are they making you a baronet because you're giving ten thousand to the party funds?

NED. My dear woman! Of course not! That's pure coincidence.

ROSE [*convinced*]. Oh!

NED. Your beloved John will be made a baronet solely on account of his splendid services to commerce. Doesn't he deserve it?

ROSE. No one better. Do you know, I can scarcely believe it. Who——? Tell me all about it.

JOHN. Well, it's thanks to Ned in the first place.

ROSE. To Ned?

NED [*pretending to be hurt*]. You needn't be so surprised, Rose. You seem to be unaware that I've gone into politics. Don't you read the newspapers?

ROSE. No, I leave the newspapers to my daughter.

NED. If you did, you'd know that I made a sensation in the Indian Debate, in the House of Lords. All that Afghanistan business, don't you know.

ROSE. Really!

NED. Oh, I became quite a nob at once. Bit of luck me having gone to India, wasn't it? I'd spent the best part of a month in India; so, of course, I knew all about it.

ROSE [*solemnly*]. Of course.

NED. The leader of the Opposition said I had a great future!

JOHN. No doubt.

NED [*simply*]. I shall specialize in India and the Navy. You see, my father being a rear-admiral, I ought to be familiar with the subject. If fellows like me don't begin to take an interest in our neglected Navy England'll be playing second fiddle to Russia in five years' time. Mark my word, in 1890. In 1890.

ROSE. Perhaps you'll be in the Government some day?

NED. There's no "perhaps" about it. I shall! There's only one difficulty.

ROSE. What's that?

NED [*mysteriously and important*]. I'm told I ought to marry.

JOHN [*rather self-consciously*]. Nothing simpler.

NED. I know! I've had seventeen indirect offers this last six months, and that's a fact.

ROSE. None suitable?

NED. I'm afraid of 'em. It's no joke going and marrying a perfect stranger. I want somebody I know—somebody I've known all my life, or at least all hers.

ROSE. And can't you find her?

NED. I can. I *have* done.

ROSE. Who is it, may one ask?

NED. Jack knows.

JOHN [*turning to* ROSE *and clearing his throat*]. Ned would like to marry into *our* family, Rose.

NED [*eagerly*]. You know I've been dead sweet on Emily for a couple of years at least.

ROSE [*after a pause*]. I know you're very fond of her, and she of you.

NED [*as above*]. You think she is, really?

ROSE. But it seems so queer.

JOHN [*peremptorily*]. How queer? We're respectable enough for the young rascal, aren't we?

ROSE. Of course. It would be ideal—ideal! My poor little Emily!

NED. Well, I've got that off my chest. I'll be moving. I must be at the Carlton at three-thirty to settle up John's business with the Panjandrum.

ROSE. You'll come back for tea. *She'll* be here.

[*Enter from the hall* EMILY *and* GERTRUDE. *Both are dressed to go out.* EMILY *is a handsome girl of twenty-two. She has fine qualities, combining her father's pluck with her mother's loving nature. But she has been rather spoilt by her parents.* GERTRUDE *follows. She has grown into a faded, acidy spinster with protective impulses for her niece* EMILY, *on whom she spends all her suppressed maternal feelings.*

EMILY [*slightly disconcerted*]. Why, Father! How is it you aren't at the works this afternoon earning our bread and butter?

JOHN [*delighted*]. Such impertinence!

ROSE. Emily, I really wonder at you! What your Grandmother Rhead would have said to such manners if she'd been alive, I daren't think. And Lord Monkhurst here, too!

EMILY. Well, Mamma, you see, Grandmother isn't alive! [*To* NED, *who, after shaking hands with* GERTRUDE, *advances towards her*] And as for dear old Uncle Ned——

[NED, JOHN, *and* ROSE *are all somewhat put about by this greeting.* NED *hesitates, his hand half out.*

Aren't you going to shake hands, then?

NED [*shaking hands*]. Why "uncle"? You've never called me uncle before?

EMILY. Haven't I? It seems to suit you.

NED. I'm severely wounded. And I shall retire into my wigwam until you make it up to me.

ROSE. You really are very pert, Emily.

EMILY [*affectionately*]. I should have thought you would adore being my uncle. I'm sure I like you lots more than I like Uncle Sam, for instance.

NED. That's better. I'm peeping out of my wigwam now. Only I won't be your uncle. I won't be anybody's uncle. I don't mind being your cousin, if that's any use to you.

GERTRUDE [*sharply*]. He's afraid of being taken for the same age as your auntie, darling.

NED [*to* GERTRUDE]. Half a moment, Gertrude, and I'll try to think of a compliment that will turn your flank.

GERTRUDE. My flank, Ned?

NED. I mean——

EMILY [*to her parents and* NED]. Where were you all off to?

ROSE. Your father and I are going to the study.

NED. And I'm going on an errand, but I shan't be long.

JOHN. And may we ask where you and Auntie Gertrude are "off to," Miss Inquisitive?

GERTRUDE. Oh, Mr Preece is calling for us to take us to the Royal Academy.

EMILY. And then we shall have tea at the new Hotel Metropole, in Northumberland Avenue. It's the very latest thing.

JOHN [*in a different tone*]. Preece? But he was here last Sunday.

EMILY. Yes, it was then we arranged it.

JOHN. I don't like the idea of your seeing so much of Preece. And your mother doesn't like it, either.

ROSE. No, indeed!

GERTRUDE. But why not? He's the cleverest man in your works. You've often said so.

JOHN. He may be the cleverest man in my works; but he isn't going to be the cleverest man in my house. Who gave him leave to take half a day off, I should like to know?

GERTRUDE. He said he had business in the West End.

EMILY [*to* NED]. Now, if you want to make yourself useful as a cousin, please explain to these so-called parents that they oughtn't to spoil me one day, and rule me with a rod of iron the next. It's not fair. It's very bad for my disposition.

NED [*to* JOHN]. Is this man-about-town the same Preece you were telling me of?

EMILY. There you are, you see! He tells every one about Mr Preece. He's as proud as Punch of Mr Preece.

JOHN [*more kindly*]. Arthur Preece is a youth that I discovered in my drawing-office. Last year I took out a patent for him for bending metal plates at a low temperature; and it's attracted some attention. But our relations are purely business.

GERTRUDE. Still, it was you who first asked him to the house.

JOHN [*drily*]. It was. And Rose kept him for tea. It's all our fault, as usual. However [*rising*]—you'll kindly tell Master Preece that you can't give yourselves the pleasure of his society this afternoon.

EMILY. But why?

JOHN [*continuing*]. And if he's obstreperous, inform him that *I* am in my study, and rather anxious to know exactly what his business in the West End is.

EMILY [*insisting*]. But why, Father?

JOHN [*firmly*]. Simply because your mother and I wish you to be in this afternoon. Uncle Sam and Aunt Nancy are coming, for one thing.

EMILY [*disdainfully*]. Uncle Sam! Aunt Nancy!

ROSE. Emily! I won't have you bandying words with your father; you seem to have lost all sense of respect.

EMILY [*to* NED *angrily*]. Aren't they tyrants!

[*She goes to a little table and takes off her bonnet in a quick, annoyed way.*

ROSE [*very politely and nicely to* GERTRUDE]. Gertrude, if *you* aren't going out could you come into the study about those addresses?

GERTRUDE [*somewhat snappishly, taking* EMILY'S *bonnet*]. Of course!

[*She goes out quickly.*

JOHN [*to* NED]. Well, you've got to be off then, for the moment.

[*All are near the door now, except* EMILY, *who is drawing off her gloves savagely.*

ROSE [*in a low voice to* NED]. Till tea, then.

[*She goes out, nodding her head significantly.*

NED [*hesitating*]. Yes. [*To* JOHN] But I must just kiss the hand of this new cousin of mine first.

JOHN [*in a peculiar tone*]. Oh! All right! [*He follows* ROSE.

NED [*going up to* EMILY, *whose face is turned away, ingratiatingly*]. Now I'm not included in this frown, am I?

EMILY [*facing him and bursting out*]. But don't you think it's a shame, seriously?

NED. Of course if you've *promised* Mr Preece, and don't want to disappoint him——

EMILY [*with false lightness*]. Oh, Mr Preece is nothing to me! Only I *do* want to know where I am. The fact is they let me do as I like in little things, and they're frightfully severe in big things. Not really big things, but—you know——

NED. Middling big things.

EMILY. After all, I'm twenty-two.

NED. A mature age.

EMILY [*huffily*]. Oh! Naturally you take their side!

NED. Honour bright, I don't! I tell you I feel far more like your age than theirs. I'm much younger than your father—much! That's why I don't like being called uncle.

EMILY. Really?

NED. Really.

EMILY [*confidentially*]. And there's another thing. They oughtn't to treat Auntie Gertrude like that, ought they? She's got more brains than anybody else here.

NED. Than your father?

EMILY. No, not than Father. I meant Mother, and Uncle Sam, and me—and you——

NED. I see.

EMILY. Who is it runs the house? You don't suppose it's Mother, do you? Mother is absorbed in Father, quite absorbed in him. No! It's Auntie does everything. And yet she's nobody, simply nobody. She arranges to take me out, and they stop it without so much as apologizing to her.

NED. Well, you see, she's an old maid.

EMILY. I don't care whether she's an old maid or not. She's the only friend I have. Father and Mother are most awfully fond of me and all that, and Mother *is* sweet, isn't she? But still that makes no difference. There are two camps in this house; they're in one, and Auntie and I are in the other. And I tell you we have to be regular conspirators, in self-defence. Of course I'm trusting you.

NED [*who has been playing with a book he has picked up from a table*] You may.

EMILY. For instance, they won't let me read Ouida. They don't even like Auntie to read Ouida.

NED. This isn't Ouida.

EMILY. I know it isn't. That's William Black. They're always throwing William Black at me, and I hate him. I want to read Ouida.

NED. You must wait till you're married.

EMILY. I won't. And I do so want to go to the Hotel Metropole.

NED. I thought it was the Royal Academy?

EMILY. The Academy too.

NED. Look here, Emily. Suppose I arrange a little theatre party?

EMILY. Not with Father and Mother. They'll want to go to something silly.

NED. No. Just your auntie and me—and you, of course.

EMILY. Will you?

NED. Rather!

EMILY. You're quite coming out. But will they allow it?

NED. You bet they will.

EMILY. Where?

NED. Anywhere you like.

EMILY. Do you know *The Mikado*'s been running three months, and I haven't seen it yet?

NED [*humming*]. "Here's a 'How d'you do'!" The Savoy, then.

EMILY. Oh! Hurrah! Hurrah! Thanks; you are a dear.

NED [*pleased*]. Am I? That's all right, then. *Au revoir.*

[*Turns to the door.*

EMILY [*calling him back*]. Cousin! [*She beckons him to come to her.*] What's this secret between you and Father and Mother?

NED. What secret?

EMILY [*crossly*]. Now you needn't pretend. I could see it as plain as anything when I came in. And when they went out too, for that matter.

NED. I can't stand being bullied.

EMILY. Tell me, and I won't bully you.

NED [*solemnly*]. You're going to be related to a baronet.

EMILY [*disturbed*]. They don't want me to marry a baronet, do they?

NED. Foolish creature! No. It's the opposite camp that's about to receive a title.

EMILY [*delighted*]. Father—a baronet!

NED. I'm just off to make the final arrangements now.

EMILY. Truly?

NED. Don't be misled by my modest exterior. I'm a terrific nob—really.

[*He turns to go.*

EMILY [*as he is going*]. Didn't you say something about kissing my hand? One of your jokes, I suppose.

[NED *comes and kisses it, then hurries to the door. As he opens it he looks back and says "The Mikado," and hurries out.*

[EMILY *stands a moment lost in thought, a smile on her lips. Then she hums, quite unconsciously, "For he's going to marry Yum-Yum, Yum-Yum!" Goes back to the table on which the William Black is lying, picks it up—opens it, reading a bit, then flings the book aside, muttering in disgust, "Black!"*

[THOMPSON *enters. He has grown old in the service of the Rheads.*

THOMPSON [*announcing*]. Mr Preece. [*He withdraws.*

[ARTHUR PREECE *enters. His age is twenty-five; he is a man of the clerk class, whose talent and energy have made him what he is. He is full of enthusiasm, earnest, but with a rough sense of humour. Rather short and stocky in figure, but important. His clothes are neat and useful—but very simple.*

PREECE [*excited*]. Good afternoon, Miss Rhead. I'm afraid I'm a little early.

EMILY [*putting on the manner of a woman of the world*]. Not at all, Mr Preece. I'm sure Auntie Gertrude will be delighted.

PREECE [*vaguely*]. She's not here now, your aunt?

EMILY [*looking round*]. No.

PREECE [*eagerly*]. I wonder if I should have time to tell you something before she comes in. It isn't that it's a secret. But nobody knows yet, and I should like you to be the first.

EMILY. How very kind of you, Mr Preece!

PREECE. I've only just known it myself.

EMILY. It seems to be very thrilling.

PREECE. It is, rather. It's just this. I've succeeded in making mild steel nearly five per cent. lighter than it's ever been made before. Nearly five per cent. lighter, and no extra cost.

EMILY. Really! How much is five per cent.?

PREECE. It's one-twentieth part. You know, it's enormous.

EMILY. I suppose it is.

PREECE. I dare say you don't quite realize what it means—this enormous change in the specific gravity. But it *is* enormous.

EMILY. What is specific gravity? In a word?

PREECE. It's—well—— Now supposing—— Do you mind if I explain that to you some other time? I'd like to, awfully!

EMILY. Oh! Any time!

PREECE. It's quite O.K., you know. And the thing comes to this. Assume the steel for a biggish ship costs twenty thousand pounds. Under my new process you'd get the same result with steel that weighed about a twentieth less and cost, roughly, nineteen thousand pounds. Net saving of nearly one thousand pounds!

EMILY [*impressed*]. And did you——?

PREECE [*continuing*]. And not only that. As the hull weighs so much less, you can carry a proportionately heavier cargo in the same bottom.

EMILY. Well, I never heard of such a thing! And am I really the first to know?

PREECE. You are.

EMILY. And you found out this all alone?

PREECE. Oh, yes! Except the manager, nobody has any idea of what I've been experimenting on.

EMILY. Not even Father?

PREECE. No.

EMILY. I suppose he knows you *are* experimenting?

PREECE. Of course. That's my job. That's what he took me out of the drawing-office for. I'm always experimenting on something.

EMILY. I expect you're what they call an inventor?

PREECE [*humorously*]. I expect I am. [*Eagerly*] I'd practically finished this experiment a week ago. But I had to make sure whether there was any manganese left in the steel. I've been getting a friend at the City and Guilds of London Institute to analyse it for me—you know, the big red building in Exhibition Road. I've just come from there.

EMILY. So *that* was your business in the West End? [PREECE *nods.*] I'm sure Auntie and I hadn't an idea it was anything half so romantic.

PREECE. It *is* romantic, isn't it?

EMILY. No wonder you're so excited.

PREECE. Am I? Well, I don't care! It's all right. That's all I care about. Here's a bit of the steel now. [*He offers her a small sample.*

EMILY. Is it for me? May I keep it?

PREECE. I want you to.

EMILY. Rather a strange thing for a girl to keep, isn't it?

PREECE. You don't mind——

EMILY. I'd part with all my jewellery before I parted with this. D'you know, it makes me feel very proud. And when I think of poor old Father not knowing anything about it——

PREECE. I shall tell him to-morrow if he can spare time to see me.

EMILY. Spare time to see *you*—why?

PREECE. Oh! you don't know, but Mr Rhead's a sort of crowned head on the works. You can't walk into his office as if it was a public-house, I can tell you.

EMILY. But it's so important for him.

PREECE. Rather! Much more important for him than for me.

EMILY. Why?

PREECE. Under our agreement! Our agreement has five years to run yet, and during that time everything I do belongs to the firm. I only get a percentage on whatever my inventions bring in.

EMILY. What percentage?

PREECE. Ten. For every hundred pounds profit I get ten pounds and the firm gets ninety.

EMILY. But what a frightful shame! It ought to be the other way about—you ninety pounds and the firm ten.

PREECE. Oh, no! It's fair enough—really! They pay me a very good salary. And you must remember if Mr Rhead hadn't taken me out of the drawing-office I should be there now getting two pounds a week!

EMILY. I don't care! I think it's a frightful shame. I shall tell Father.

PREECE [*half playfully*]. Please don't, unless you want to ruin me with him. I owe just about everything to your father.

EMILY. But it's so horridly unfair.

PREECE. Oh, no! I assure you. I shall have all the money I want, and more. And it will always be *my* invention. That's the point.

EMILY. Then you don't care for money?

PREECE. Yes, I do. I want enough. In fact, I want a good deal. But what's interesting is to *do* things, and to do 'em better and quicker and less clumsily than ever they were done before. If I can make nineteen tons of steel do the work of twenty—well, I reckon I've accomplished something for the world.

EMILY. I like that. It's very original.

PREECE. Not my notion, you know. I'm a disciple of William Morris.

EMILY. Oh! He's a poet, isn't he?

PREECE. You should read *The Earthly Paradise*.

EMILY. I should love to.

PREECE. If people would read a bit more William Morris, and less of these silly gimcrack novels about lords and actresses—Ouida and so on—— What's the matter?

EMILY. Nothing. [*With a certain self-satisfaction*] William Black's silly too, isn't he?

PREECE. Of course.

EMILY [*firmly*]. I'm going to read *The Earthly Paradise*.

PREECE. Let me lend it you. I've got a signed copy, from the author.

EMILY. You know an author!

PREECE. I know William Morris. I was up at his stable last night.

EMILY. His stable?

PREECE. He gives lectures in a stable behind his house at Hammersmith. I wish you'd heard him pitching into the House of Lords. "A squad of dukes."

EMILY. But why?

PREECE. Oh, because they aren't interested in the right thing.

EMILY. What is the right thing?

PREECE. The right thing is to make the world fit to live in.

EMILY. But isn't it?

PREECE. Have you ever been to the East End?

EMILY. I did some slumming once, just to see. But I was so ashamed to go into their awful houses, that I never tried again.

PREECE [*getting up, excited*]. That's grand! That's grand! That's just how I feel. Every one feels like that that's got any imagination and any sense of justice. We *ought* to be ashamed of the East End. At least the governing classes ought. Not for the poor, but for themselves. They ought to go and get buried if they can't govern better than that.

EMILY [*after a pause, rising as in thought; moved*]. But how are you going to change it?

PREECE. Not by slumming, that's a certainty. You can only change it by getting some decent laws passed, and by playing fair, and doing your job, and thinking a great deal less about eating and drinking, and fine clothes, and being in the swim, and all that sort of nonsense. Do you know what I am going to do as soon as I can afford? I'm going to be a Member of Parliament.

EMILY [*low*]. Why did you offer to take us to the Hotel Metropole?

PREECE [*confused*]. I thought you'd like it. I—I——

EMILY. You despise it yourself.

PREECE. I'm human.

EMILY. But—— [*She draws close to him.*

PREECE. I'm very ambitious. I want a whole lot of things. But if I thought I could find some one—find a woman, who—who feels as I feel; who'd like before everything to help to make the world decent—I'd——

EMILY. I—— [*Profoundly stirred, she falls into his arms.*

PREECE. Emily! [*He kisses her long, holding her close.*

EMILY [*gently releases herself and walks away. With effort*]. I haven't told you. I forgot. Father doesn't wish me to go out with you this afternoon. He's here now, in the study.

[GERTRUDE *enters from the hall, without her bonnet this time.*

GERTRUDE. Good afternoon, Mr Preece. [*They shake hands. To* EMILY] I suppose you—er—told Mr Preece that the excursion is countermanded? [*She goes to the fireplace.*

EMILY. Yes, Mr Preece was just going. [*Gently*] Good afternoon. [*She holds out her hand to* PREECE, *who hesitates.* EMILY *repeats in firmer tone*] Good afternoon. [*In a tender voice*] Please! [*With a smile*] Another time! [PREECE *shakes hands and, bowing to* GERTRUDE, *retires.*

[*As he departs* GERTRUDE *rings the bell by the fireplace.*

GERTRUDE. Well, I've been catching it, I can tell you!

EMILY [*shaken*]. What about?

GERTRUDE. About you. They simply asked me to go into the study so that I could be talked to—for your good, my girl.

EMILY. They weren't rude, were they?

GERTRUDE. You know your mother's always almost most considerate. She's an angel. But your father rubbed it in finely. How many times had you seen the young man?—If ever alone?—What on earth was I thinking of?—What on earth was your mother doing to have noticed nothing? (As if your mother ever noticed anything!) And so on! Of course, I told them pretty straight that they were making a most ridiculous fuss about nothing.

EMILY. Well, anyhow, I've let him kiss me.

GERTRUDE. You've let him kiss you? When?

EMILY. Just now. Here.

GERTRUDE. But what——

EMILY. Don't ask me. I don't know, I really don't. But I've felt it coming for some time.

GERTRUDE. Do you mean to say he walked in here and proposed to you straight off, and you accepted him?

EMILY. I didn't accept him, because he didn't propose. He was talking about his ideas.

GERTRUDE. What ideas?

EMILY [*with a vague gesture*]. Oh, about the world in general, and all that he means to do. He's made another marvellous invention, only no one knows except me. It was the excited way he talked—somehow—I couldn't help it—before I knew what we were doing, he'd got his arms round me.

GERTRUDE [*rather sternly, in spite of her tender feeling*]. Well, Emily, I must say I'm very surprised.

EMILY. So am I.

GERTRUDE. Of course you're engaged to him?

EMILY. Am I?

GERTRUDE. And it'll be all my fault. However, it's got to be seen through to the end now.

EMILY. He has very strange ideas. They sound splendid when he's explaining them. But d'you know, he thinks Ouida's silly.

GERTRUDE. Does he?

EMILY. And he really doesn't care about money and fashion and all that sort of thing. He despises going to the Hotel Metropole. He only offered to go there because he thought it would please our horrid little minds—I was so ashamed.

GERTRUDE. But surely you knew all this before—at least you guessed it?

EMILY. I didn't, Auntie. I never thought about his ideas, never! just——

GERTRUDE. You just simply fell into his arms as soon as you heard them, that's all. Well, surely in that case you must admire these ideas of his tremendously. [*She sits in an armchair.*

EMILY. I don't know. Yes. I *admire* them, but——

GERTRUDE. Listen, young woman! Are you in love with him, or aren't you?

EMILY. I—I—— How can you tell whether you're in love with a man or not?

GERTRUDE. Supposing you were alone with him here, now—would you let him kiss you again? [*Pause.*

EMILY. I——

GERTRUDE. Now, out with it!

EMILY. I shouldn't be able to stop him, should I?

GERTRUDE. That's enough.

EMILY. Yes. But then what about Father? He would be frightfully angry, I can see that. Oh, I do hate unpleasantness, Auntie. And Mr Preece's ideas are really very peculiar.

GERTRUDE [*after a look at* EMILY]. Listen, Emily! I was once engaged to be married.

EMILY. Oh, Auntie! I always knew you must have been. Do tell me. Who was it?

GERTRUDE. Your Uncle Sam.

EMILY [*staggered*]. Not Uncle Sam?

GERTRUDE. You're surprised, naturally. But you mustn't be too hard. Remember it was twenty-five years ago. Uncle Sam was a splendid fellow then. He's old now. We're all old, except you—and Mr Preece. You've got the only thing worth having, you two.

EMILY [*sitting at* GERTRUDE'S *feet*]. What's that?

GERTRUDE. Youth. Your Uncle Sam lived the miserable life of a bachelor till he was fifty. He'd have been a very different man if I'd married him. And I should have been a very different woman.

EMILY. Why did you break it off?

GERTRUDE. I broke it off because there were difficulties; and because I thought his ideas were peculiar; and because I hated unpleasantness! And now look at me! Couldn't I have ruled a house and a family? Couldn't I have played the hostess? [*In another tone*] To-day the one poor little joy I have in life is to pretend I'm your mother. Look at my position here. I'm only——

EMILY [*passionately*]. Oh, Auntie, don't! I can't bear to hear you say it. I know!

GERTRUDE. We were opposites in every way, your uncle and I, but I—I loved him.

EMILY [*softly*]. Do you still love him, Auntie?

GERTRUDE [*in a flat tone of despair*]. No! Love dies out.

EMILY [*after a moment*]. Why didn't you marry somebody else?

GERTRUDE. There *was* nobody else. There never is anybody else when you've made the mistake I made. Marry! I could have chosen among a dozen men! But they were all the wrong men. Emily! Fancy pouring out tea every day of your life for the wrong man. Every breakfast time—every afternoon! And there he sits, and nothing will move him. Think of that, Emily—think of that. [*A pause.*

EMILY [*embracing her again*]. Oh, Auntie! *I* love you awfully!

GERTRUDE. You must show some courage, my girl. Don't be afraid of anything—and especially not of arguments and threats. What does unpleasantness matter, after all? It's over in a month; but a mistake lasts for ever.

EMILY. You'll help me?

GERTRUDE. That's all I live for. [*She kisses* EMILY *tenderly.*] Is that Sam's voice? [THOMPSON *enters.*

THOMPSON [*announcing*]. Mr and Mrs Sibley. [*He retires.*

[SAMUEL SIBLEY *and his wife* NANCY *enter.* SAMUEL, *who is now fifty-three, has grown into a rather flabby nonentity, grey-haired, with longish side-whiskers and glasses. His manner is important and fussy.* NANCY *is a buxom Yorkshire woman of thirty-two, round-faced, good-natured, full of energy. She wears the fashionable jersey of* 1885 *and a very definite 'bustle.'*

SAM. Well, Gertrude! Well, my little Emmie!

[*He kisses* EMILY, *who gives her cheek unwillingly; then shakes hands with* GERTRUDE.

GERTRUDE. How are you, Sam; and you, Mrs Sam?

NANCY. Nicely, thank you! [*Shaking hands vigorously with* GERTRUDE *and* EMILY] Everybody well here?

EMILY. Yes, thank you.

NANCY. That's fine! Then your mother got Sam's letter saying we were coming?

EMILY [*drily*]. Oh, yes!

NANCY. I said to Sam it would happen be best to write and tell you. So he wrote [*with a look at* SAM]—finally.

SAM [*with a serious tone*]. We nearly didn't come.

GERTRUDE. Anything wrong?

SAM. Infant's temperature up at a hundred last night. However, it was normal this morning.

NANCY. You know he takes the baby's temperature every night.

EMILY. Oh, do you, Uncle? How funny!

SAM. I don't see anything funny about it, niece. Good thing if some parents took their responsibilities a bit more seriously.

NANCY. I must say Sam makes a very good father.

GERTRUDE. Let me see—how old is Dickie now?

SAM. We never call him Dickie—Richard, better; less nonsensical. [*He settles down solemnly in a chair.*

NANCY. You've no idea what I call him when you're not there, Sam! [*To* GERTRUDE] He was two on the second of this month. He talks like anything! You ought to see him and his father together. It's killing! The little thing's so *exactly* like Sam.

EMILY [*examining* SAM]. Is he? We must go down to Brockley, mustn't we, Auntie?

NANCY [*drily*]. I've been expecting you for the better part of some time. [*Then cordially*] I should love you to come as soon as I've got a new cook. [*With emphasis*] Oh, my!

GERTRUDE. Are you having trouble?

NANCY. Trouble's not the word. And as for the nursemaid! If it wasn't for Sam being free——

GERTRUDE. D'you take your share, Sam?

NANCY. By the hour he wheels that child up and down.

EMILY. Not in the street?

SAM. Why not, niece? Anything to be ashamed of in being a father?

NANCY. That's what we came up for to-day, to buy a new perambulator. He did try to repair the other in the little workshop he's made himself at the end of the garden—and most useful he is for odd jobs. Upon my word, he's busy from morning to night! But we thought it better to buy a new pram altogether.

SAM [*discontented*]. Nancy would insist on having one of those new things with indiarubber tyres, as they call them.

NANCY [*very definitely*]. Now, Sam. I thought we'd done with that question.

SAM. Yes; but rubber tyres on gravel paths! It's obvious they'll not last a——

NANCY. I told you Mrs Caton across the road told me——

SAM. Oh, very well! Very well! Only it's very light and flimsy.

EMILY [*restless*]. I think I'll go and tell Father and Mother you're here. [*Going towards the door.*

NANCY [*rising, very convinced*]. Come and see for yourself what you think of the pram and the rubber tyres.

EMILY. Is it here?

NANCY. Yes, in the hall.

SAM. I deemed it imprudent to let them send it down by train. So we brought it away on the roof of a four-wheeler.

EMILY [*patronizingly*]. Well, let's go and inspect it, Aunt Nancy.

[EMILY *and* NANCY *go off.*

GERTRUDE [*waiting till the door is closed; in low, quiet tones*]. Sam,

I'm so glad you've come. There's going to be another tragedy in this house if some of us don't do something.

SAM. *Another* tragedy? What do you mean?

GERTRUDE. I just mean a tragedy. That child's head over heels in love with young Arthur Preece, at the works, and John simply won't hear of it.

SAM. Why?

GERTRUDE [*shrugs her shoulders*]. Why, indeed? Sam, if there's any discussion while you're here I want you to help me all you can.

SAM. But really, Gertrude, how can I meddle in an affair like that? I have my own responsibilities.

GERTRUDE. Sam, it's many years since I asked the slightest favour of you.

SAM [*moved, friendly*]. Come, come Don't go so far back as all that. We're all very comfortable as we are, I think. [*The door opens.*

GERTRUDE [*quick and low*]. But will you? You've got more influence than I have.

SAM [*low*]. All right. [*Pats her arm.*] All right.

[*Enter* ROSE *and* JOHN.

JOHN [*coming up to* SAM *a little patronizingly*]. Sam, glad to see you! How's the precious family getting on? Any new trouble lately?

SAM [*a little sharply*]. Oh, no! And what about yours? [*In a significant, bantering tone*] Any new trouble lately?

JOHN. Mine? Trouble? No!

ROSE [*kissing* SAM *fondly*]. Your wife's here?

SAM. She's downstairs somewhere——

JOHN [*interrupting sharply*]. Where's Emily?

GERTRUDE. She's just gone with Mrs Sam to look at a new perambulator——

JOHN [*interrupting again*]. Preece hasn't been, has he?

GERTRUDE. He's been and gone.

JOHN. Were you here?

GERTRUDE. I was here part of the time.

JOHN. You ought to have been here all the time. What did you tell him?

GERTRUDE. Emily told him you wished us to stay at home this afternoon.

JOHN [*nodding curtly*]. So much for that.

SAM. So even *you* are not quite without 'em, Jack?

JOHN. Not quite without what?

SAM. Family troubles.

JOHN. What in heaven's name are you driving at?

SAM. Nothing. I only gathered from your tone that Preece was considered—er—dangerous.

JOHN [*hedging*]. Oh, no! I'm merely taking precautions. Preece is an excellent fellow in his way—brilliant even.

SAM. But you wouldn't care for him as a son-in-law.

JOHN [*positively*]. I should not!

ROSE [*shaking her head*]. No!

SAM. I've always understood he had a great career before him.

JOHN. So he has, undoubtedly. You should see what he's got me to do at the works. Made me instal the telephone. And his latest is that he wants me to put down an electric-light plant. What do you think of that?

SAM. He must be very enthusiastic.

GERTRUDE. I should think he just is!

JOHN. Why, the boy's invention mad. He thinks of nothing else.

SAM. Well, if you ask me I'd sooner have that kind of madness than most kinds I meet with. Seems to me people have gone mad on bicycles or banjo-playing or this lawn-tennis, as it's called. It was different in our day, Jack, when young men took an interest in volunteering and the defence of their country. I've quite decided when our boy grows up——

GERTRUDE [*putting a hand on* SAM'S *arm*]. Sam!—Emily may be back any moment. We were talking about Arthur Preece.

SAM. So we were. [*Turns again to* JOHN.] Well, Jack——

JOHN [*annoyed*]. Look here, Sam—I don't mind being frank with you. Her mother and I have somebody else in view for Emily.

SAM. Oh!

GERTRUDE [*bitterly*]. I thought as much. [*A slight pause.*

JOHN [*carelessly to* SAM]. Have you heard I'm going to have a title?

SAM. No! What title?

JOHN. Baronet.

GERTRUDE [*quickly*]. You never told me.

ROSE [*soothingly*]. It only came out this afternoon, Gertrude dear.

SAM. Oh—ho!

JOHN [*still with an affectation of carelessness*]. And what's more, Emily can marry—under the very happiest auspices—into the peerage. That's why we don't want her to see too much of young Preece.

SAM. And may one ask who is the peer?

JOHN. Monkhurst, of course.

SAM. Ned!

GERTRUDE. Ned?

ROSE. Wouldn't it be ideal, Sam?

SAM. He's keen—Ned?

JOHN. Very! Put that in your pipe and smoke it, my boy.

[EMILY *and* NANCY *re-enter rather suddenly. All the others have a self-conscious air.*

JOHN [*rather negligently*]. Well, Nancy. How are you? It seems the infant's grown out of his pram. [*Shakes hands.*

NANCY [*rather proud of being able to call the great man "John," and yet trying not to be proud*]. Glad to see you, John.

[ROSE *and* NANCY *embrace.*

[*An awkward pause.*

EMILY [*with suspicion*]. What's the matter here? More secrets?

GERTRUDE [*in an outburst*]. It's being arranged that you are to marry Lord Monkhurst.

JOHN [*nonplussed, coldly angry*]. Gertrude, are you stark staring mad—blurting things out like that?

ROSE [*shocked*]. Gertrude dear—really!

GERTRUDE [*firmly*]. She'd better know, hadn't she?

JOHN. You——

NANCY [*blandly*]. Well, anyhow, the fat's in the fire now, isn't it, John?

JOHN [*turning to* NANCY]. Sorry you've been let in for a bit of a scene, Nancy.

NANCY [*cheerfully*]. Oh! Don't mind me. I know what family life is—my word! I'm from Yorkshire! Best to have it out fair and square—that's my experience.

SAM. That's what she always says when the infant's obstreperous. Why, the night before last, just as we were getting off to sleep——

JOHN. There's nothing to have out!

GERTRUDE. Oh, yes, there is. Emily's in love with Arthur Preece.

JOHN. What's this?

EMILY [*very nervous; to* GERTRUDE]. What do you mean—it's being arranged for me to marry Lord Monkhurst? Me—marry old Ned!

JOHN. He's not old.

EMILY. Isn't he old enough to be my father?

JOHN. Certainly not.

SAM [*mischievously*]. I doubt it.

JOHN [*turning on him*]. You're the last man to talk about difference of age between husband and wife.

ROSE [*smoothing over the awkwardness*]. But you're very happy, aren't you, dear?

SAM. Naturally.

NANCY. I don't see that age matters—so long as people really fancy each other. I'm sure Sam gets younger every day.

JOHN. Of course! [*Turning to* EMILY *angrily*] What's this tale about you being in love with Preece?

EMILY. I——

JOHN. Has he been proposing to you?

EMILY. No.

JOHN [*disdainfully*]. Then how can you be in love with him?

EMILY [*resenting his tone*]. Well, I *am* in love with him, if you want to know, Father.

JOHN. You have the audacity——

NANCY. Come, John, it's not a crime.

JOHN. Preece is not of our class at all. It's a gross mistake to marry out of your class.

NANCY [*bantering*]. Now, John, that's not very tactful, seeing that Sam married out of *his* class.

SAM. Don't be foolish, Nan! I married a lady. Even a marquis couldn't do more.

JOHN. My dear Nancy, you belong to the family—that's enough! Preece is quite a different affair. Just a common clerk until I——

EMILY. I can't see what more you want. He has the most beautiful manners, and, as for money, he'll make lots.

JOHN. How will he make lots?

EMILY. With his inventions. You haven't heard about his latest. But I have. He's told me. Here it is.

[*Hands piece of steel to her father.*

JOHN [*taking it*]. And what's this?

EMILY. I don't know exactly. But it's very wonderful. It's steel, I think—a new kind.

JOHN [*drily*]. Yes. I see it's steel.

EMILY. And I think it's a great shame for you to take nine-tenths of all the money from his inventions, and for *him* to only have one-tenth.

JOHN [*flashing up*]. What? Has he been whining to you in that style?

EMILY [*passionately*]. No, he hasn't been whining to me in that style. He hasn't been whining at all. He thought it was quite fair. It only came out by pure accident, and I promised I'd never breathe a word. You must forget what I've said.

JOHN. I'll teach him——

EMILY [*more passionately*]. If you ever say a single thing, Father, I'll run away and never come back.

ROSE. Child! please! [*She tries to soothe her.*

SAM [*to calm the stress*]. Hand over, Jack. [*Takes the piece of steel and looks at it.*] I fully admit I was wrong about iron. But even *you* won't prophesy that steel's going to take the place of iron for ships!

JOHN [*shortly*]. I don't think it is on *my* works. But as for prophesying—I don't prophesy. Heaven knows no one can accuse me of being conservative in my ideas. But I must say the new generation seems to be going clean off its head. If one of these up-to-date inventors came along and told me he'd made a flying-machine I should keep my nerve. I shouldn't blench.

SAM. Good! Good!

GERTRUDE. Now you're at flying-machines! What have flying-machines got to do with Emily's happiness? If she wants to marry young Preece——

EMILY. Yes, if I want to marry him, why shouldn't I?

ROSE. Because your father objects.

EMILY. Oh, Mother. Didn't you marry Father in spite of every one?

JOHN. Who's told you that?

EMILY. I know. [*General glances at* GERTRUDE.

ROSE [*indignant*]. Do you mean to compare young Preece with your father?

EMILY. Why not? You loved Father, and I——

JOHN. I'll tell you why not. I was independent. I was my own master. Young Mr Preece isn't. That's why.

GERTRUDE [*sarcastically*]. Surely it's a free country—for men!

JOHN. It's not a country where honest men break their contracts. Young Preece can't patent an invention without me. Can't do anything without me. If I like, I can force him to mark time for five years, five solid years.

EMILY. Does that mean that if I married him in spite of you——

ROSE [*horrified*]. Child! Well may you say we've spoilt you!

JOHN [*calmly*]. It means that if he had the impudence to marry you, I'd scotch him—*that* I would!

EMILY. But why? Who's going to suffer? How can my marriage affect anybody but me?

JOHN. Don't talk like a little fool. Your marriage is the most important thing in the whole world to your mother and me. And if you persist in doing something against our will, I shall retaliate—that's all.

EMILY [*with a despairing gesture*]. I can't make out your objections to Mr Preece. Why, he's a genius; every one *knows* he's a genius.

JOHN. And what if he is? Are geniuses to be the kings of the earth? Not quite! Geniuses have to be kept in order—like criminals. If there's one thing above all to be said in favour of the English character, it is that we've known the proper way to treat geniuses.

SAM. I'm inclined to agree with you there.

JOHN [*to* EMILY]. Oh, it isn't Preece's class I object to. He's presentable enough. The whole truth is he's a highly dangerous sort of young man we're breeding in these days. He—he makes you feel—uncomfortable. On the works, under discipline, admirable. Outside the works—no, no, and no! I've been following Master Preece's activities far more closely than he thinks. He little guesses I know he's a Socialist!

SAM. A Socialist! Good God! Gertrude, you never told me that. A Socialist!

GERTRUDE. Why are men always so frightened by names?

JOHN. A Socialist. [*To* EMILY, *an ultimatum*] And I don't intend you to marry him. If you do, you ruin him. That's the long and short of it. Now, Emily, have we heard the last of Preece—or not?

ROSE [*to* EMILY] Darling!

GERTRUDE. I really think you ought——

JOHN [*curtly*]. Pardon me, Gertrude. This isn't your affair. It's my daughter's.

GERTRUDE [*to* EMILY]. Your father is right. It's your affair. It depends solely on you.

EMILY [*weeping imploringly*]. What am I to do, Auntie?

[GERTRUDE *turns away with a movement of pain and disgust.* I don't want to make everybody miserable.

GERTRUDE [*reproachfully*]. Oh, Emily!

EMILY. I couldn't stand—in Mr Preece's light! I couldn't.

JOHN. There! There! Of course you couldn't.

ROSE [*comforting her*]. My poor lamb!

JOHN. And don't go and suppose I want to compel you to marry Monkhurst—or anybody. You're absolutely free.

GERTRUDE [*sniffs audibly*]. H'm!

JOHN [*glaring at* GERTRUDE, *to* EMILY]. Only, as your aunt *has* dragged in his name, I don't see any harm in telling you this much. He adores you. We all like him. His wife will have a position second to none in London Society. But don't let that influence you. Take him or refuse him as you please; your mother and I won't complain.

ROSE. Indeed we shan't, my love.

JOHN. Still a marriage like this is not to be sneezed at. Is it, Emily? [*Pause.*] I say, *is* it?

EMILY [*trying to smile; weakly*]. No.

JOHN [*continuing*]. Not that I think it wouldn't be a big slice of luck for Monkhurst too! There's only one Emily! [*He pats her.*] And then my title——

NANCY. Your title, John?

JOHN [*carelessly*]. Haven't you heard?

NANCY. No!

JOHN [*as above*]. Baronetcy!

NANCY [*staggered*]. Wonders'll never cease. [*To* ROSE] What a pity you've got no son, dear!

ROSE [*with a trace of bitterness*]. Don't crow over us, dear!

[*She clasps* EMILY *to her.*

SAM [*with a sigh of regret for himself*]. Well, well! And I've retired into private life!

JOHN [*surveying him patronizingly*]. And you've retired into private life. You're safe at Brockley. But then you see you hadn't got a bee in your bonnet.

SAM [*accepting the sarcasm with a foolish smile*]. Well, well!

NANCY [*sharply*]. I don't see that there's any need for so much well-welling.

JOHN. Come and give your father a kiss, Em. [EMILY *obeys.*

GERTRUDE [*rising as* EMILY *does so, full of emotion*]. I——

[THOMPSON *enters, followed by a footman. They bring in tea.* GERTRUDE *pulls herself together. There is a slight pause while the servants arrange the tea-things. They leave the room.*

ROSE. Emily dear, will you pour out?

EMILY [*demurely*]. Yes, Mother.

ROSE. I hope Ned won't be late.

NANCY. Is Lord Monkhurst coming for tea?

ROSE. He promised to.

NANCY. Oh, dear! If I'd known I was going to meet him—— [*She rises and arranges her bustle and the draperies of her skirt.*] I do hope he won't notice that pram. A pram in a hall looks so common.

[*She reseats herself.*

[THOMPSON *enters.*

THOMPSON [*announcing*]. Lord Monkhurst! [*He retires.*

GERTRUDE [*passionately*]. Here's your lord! [NED *enters rapidly.*

NED. Well, kind friends. Hullo, Sam!

SAM. Hullo, Ned! [*They shake hands.*] By the way, my wife—Nancy, Lord Monkhurst. [NANCY, *flustered, bows.*

NED [*going towards* EMILY]. Delighted! Any of that tea for me?

GERTRUDE [*with great feeling*]. And there's your tea—your daily tea, for the rest of your life!

JOHN [*angrily*]. Gertrude!

GERTRUDE. No, I will speak! Ned, what would *you* do, if I told you that——

EMILY [*pleading*]. Aunt Gertrude, please——

GERTRUDE. Emily!

EMILY [*weakly*]. It's all right, Auntie.

GERTRUDE. All right? Oh, very well! [*Desperately*] What's the use? [*She turns and walks quickly out of the room.*

NED [*surprised at* GERTRUDE'S *tone*]. What's the matter with dear Gertrude?

JOHN. Nothing. One of her moods. [*Drawing up a chair, with authority*] Now then, Emily—tea!

# ACT III

## 1912

*The same drawing-room, but now in* 1912 *it has undergone an entire change. All the old mid-Victorian furniture has been crowded out by furniture of later style. Changes of ornaments, etc. The lights are electric; so is the bell by the fireplace.*

*It is a June evening, about half-past ten at night. Signs of festivity—flowers; presents (in gold) are standing about. It is the evening of the golden wedding of* JOHN *and* ROSE.

WEBSTER, *a smart, military-looking butler of forty, is arranging a tray of whisky and soda. The door to the hall opens, and a footman enters.*

FOOTMAN [*announcing*]. Lord Monkhurst. [*He withdraws.*

[LORD MONKHURST *enters. He is a young man-about-town of twenty-two, tall, hollow-chested, careless in his manners, very self-assured, and properly bored.*

MONKHURST. I say, Webster.

WEBSTER. Good evening, my lord.

MONKHURST [*cheerfully*]. I suppose dinner's over?

WEBSTER [*looking at his watch*]. It's half-past ten, my lord.

MONKHURST. Of course, they'll all say I'm late for dinner.

WEBSTER. Oh, no, my lord. Shall I order some dinner for your lordship?

MONKHURST. No. Who's here now?

WEBSTER. Lady Monkhurst and Miss Muriel; Miss Rhead, Mrs Samuel Sibley, and Mr Richard Sibley.

MONKHURST. Yes. I know *he's* here. Many people at the reception this afternoon?

WEBSTER. Droves, my lord.

MONKHURST. I suppose these ghastly things are the presents?

WEBSTER. As your lordship says.

MONKHURST. Dashed if I can understand why my grandfather should make such a fuss about his golden wedding. [*Very cheerfully*] Was he very angry at my not turning up?

WEBSTER. Considering his age, no, my lord. I took the liberty of suggesting to him that this might be one of your busy weeks, my lord, and that your lordship could never tell beforehand——

MONKHURST. You're a clever chap, Webster. Why the devil did you leave the Army?

WEBSTER. Probably because, as your lordship says, I'm clever. There's

more brains outside the Army than in it, my lord. And like turns to like.

MONKHURST [*laughing in a superior way*]. Ha! ha! Really!

WEBSTER. Fact is, I enlisted under a misapprehension, when I was in a temper. I have to thank your lordship's late father for helping me to re-enter my old profession, and under the most auspicious circumstances.

MONKHURST. Well, we could do with more fellahs like you. I've not yet found any sergeant to draw my sketch-maps for me half as well as you used to. [*He is looking over the tray of drinks.*

WEBSTER. Ah, my lord! Those half-guineas came in very handy, very handy. Glorious times, no doubt. But I wouldn't go back.

MONKHURST. Bring me a benedictine, will you?

[EMILY, *now* LADY MONKHURST, *forty-eight, enters by the double doors. She has developed into a handsome, well-preserved woman of the world. She wears an evening dress of rich brocade and magnificent pearls.*

MONKHURST. Well, Mater, I don't see much sign of the fatted calf.

EMILY [*annoyed*]. Gerald, your poor father was witty; you are merely facetious. I wish you could cure yourself.

MONKHURST. Now, what's the matter now?

EMILY. What's the matter? You must needs choose your grandparents' golden wedding to go to Sandown. You promised me you'd be back early, at any rate in time for the tail end of the reception; and you don't even appear for dinner. Your grandfather is very displeased.

MONKHURST. If a fellow keeps a stable, he keeps a stable. Somebody's got to look after the gees in these days. And then——

[*Hesitates.*

EMILY. Please don't tell me your car broke down. I've heard that too often.

MONKHURST. It didn't—this time.

EMILY. Have you dined?

MONKHURST. I have.

EMILY. Whom with? [*Silence.*] One of your numerous "lady friends," I presume. Gerald, I'm ashamed of you.

MONKHURST. You've no right to be ashamed of me. If you want to know, I dined at the House of Lords.

EMILY. At the House of Lords?

MONKHURST. At the House of Lords. They telephoned to me at Sandown to come up for an important division, and I was kept hanging about there till after ten o'clock. Jolly amusing place, the House of Lords.

EMILY [*rather taken aback*]. Why didn't you tell me at first?

MONKHURST. Because I just wanted to teach you a lesson, Mater. You're always ragging me about something or other.

EMILY. You might at least have telephoned.

MONKHURST. When a chap's doing his duty to his country he can't always think about telephoning.

EMILY. My dear Gerald, if you mean to follow in your father's footsteps, nobody will be more delighted than your mother. There'd be nothing to prevent you from being Master of the Horse if you chose. Only, my chick——

MONKHURST. Only your what?

EMILY. You must alter your manner of living.

MONKHURST. My manner of living, my dear Mater, is my own affair. [*With meaning*] If you'd leave me alone, and look after your other "chick" a little bit more——

EMILY. What do you mean? Muriel?

MONKHURST. Precisely. The Honourable Muriel.

EMILY. Why?

MONKHURST. Oh! I know Muriel can do no wrong. Still I spotted her at the top of the stairs just now practically in the arms of the good Richard.

EMILY. Richard?

MONKHURST [*intoning*]. And Samuel took to wife Nancy, and begat Richard. And Samuel passed away in the fulness of years and his son Richard reigned in his stead. And Richard looked upon Muriel, and lo! she was beautiful in the eyes of Richard——

EMILY. Hush, Gerald! Aren't you mistaken? I've never seen the slightest thing——

MONKHURST. That shows how blind you are, then! Of course I'm not mistaken.

EMILY. Are you sure?

MONKHURST. Do you take me for a fool, Mater?

EMILY [*positively*]. Richard, indeed! I shall put a stop to it.

MONKHURST [*almost savagely*]. I should jolly well think you would.

[*Enter* WEBSTER *from the hall with a liqueur on a salver.* MONKHURST *takes it and drinks it slowly.*

EMILY. Webster, will you kindly ask Miss Muriel to come here?

WEBSTER. Very good, my lady. [*He goes out.*

[MONKHURST *nods knowingly to his mother, as if to say, "Now you'll see!"*

[NANCY *enters by the double doors. She has grown into a rather red-faced, plump, old woman of fifty-eight. She is good-natured, but is quick to retort. Her laugh is rather loud, her manner more definite than ever.*

NANCY. Good evening, young man.

MONKHURST. Good evening.

NANCY. So you've come at——

EMILY [*interrupting her*]. Aunt Nancy, I've just had to send for Muriel to come here.

NANCY. What's amiss?

EMILY. I—well—I hardly like——

MONKHURST. Your excellent son Richard has been seen trying to kiss my sister.

NANCY. What was *she* doing?

EMILY. Well, that's not the point.

NANCY. And supposing he *was* trying to kiss Muriel?

EMILY. I must say, Aunt Nancy, you don't seem very surprised.

NANCY. Who *would* be? You invite young people to a golden wedding, and then you're startled when you catch 'em kissing. What else do you expect?

EMILY. I expect a good deal else.

NANCY. Then you're likely to be disappointed. As a matter of fact, I knew Richard was going to kiss Muriel to-night.

EMILY. Who told you?

NANCY. *He* did, of course. At least, he let out to me he was going to propose to her. He usually gets what he wants, you know.

EMILY [*angrily surprised*]. H'm!

MONKHURST [*very definitely*]. He won't get what he wants this time.

NANCY. Oh?

MONKHURST. You must see that my sister can't marry an engineer.

NANCY. Well—why not an engineer? What are *you*? I can tell you what you might have been, if you hadn't been born in the right bedroom: you might have been a billiard-marker. What have you done? Tell me a single thing you've done!

MONKHURST. I've—oh! What tripe!

EMILY. Really, Aunt Nancy——

NANCY. Yes, my son *is* an engineer. And if you want to know what sort of an engineer he is go to Mr Arthur Preece.

MONKHURST [*disdainfully*]. Who's Preece?

NANCY [*imitating his tone*]. Ask your mother who *Preece* is.

EMILY [*self-consciously*]. Aunt Nancy!

NANCY [*continuing*]. You aren't old enough to remember Mr Preece as an engineer, but, at any rate, you know he's in the House of Commons, whereas you're only in the House of Lords. And I'd like you to tell me where your grandfather'd have been last week with all his workmen on strike—but for Mr Preece!

MONKHURST. Oh, *that* Preece!

NANCY. Exactly. And it's that Preece that thinks the world of my son. My son's been out to Canada, and look how he got on in

Winnipeg! And now he's going out again, whose capital is he taking but your grandfather's? I should like to see your grandfather trust *you* with thirty thousand pounds and a ticket to Canada.

MONKHURST. I'm in no need of capital, thank ye.

NANCY. Lucky for you you aren't! My husband left me very badly off, poor man, but I could count on Richard. A pretty look-out for your mother if she'd had to count on you!

EMILY [*impatient*]. Really, Aunt Nancy——

NANCY [*nettled*]. Well, you leave my son alone.

[*Enter from the hall* MURIEL *and* RICHARD. MURIEL *is a handsome girl of twenty-four, rather thin and eager, with a high forehead, and much distinction. She has herself under absolute control.* RICHARD *is a tall, broad, darkish fellow of twenty-seven, with a clean-shaven, heavy face and rough hair. He is very taciturn.*

EMILY. Muriel, it was you that I asked for.

MURIEL [*quite calmly*]. We were both just coming to tell you.

EMILY. Tell me what?

MURIEL. We're engaged.

EMILY. Does Richard leave you to say this to me?

MURIEL. Well, you know he was never a great talker.

RICHARD. There it is—we're engaged.

NANCY [*to* MURIEL]. How matter-of-fact you are, you girls, nowadays. [*She caresses* RICHARD.

MURIEL. Well, nobody seems strikingly enthusiastic here.

EMILY. I should think not. I don't like these underhand ways.

MURIEL. What underhand ways? Surely you didn't expect Richard to announce in advance the exact place and hour he was going to propose to me.

EMILY. Please don't try to imitate your dear father. You're worse than Gerald sometimes.

MURIEL. Oh, very well, Mamma! What else?

EMILY. Do you mean to tell me you're seriously thinking of going out to Canada—to Winnipeg—for the rest of your days?

MURIEL. Of course, Mamma! I'm sure I shall be happier there than here.

EMILY. You'll leave England?

MURIEL. Certainly. Politics are much more satisfactory over there, except for woman's suffrage. All the questions that all the silly statesmen are still wrangling about here have been settled over there ages ago.

EMILY. My poor girl!

MURIEL. Mamma, I wish you wouldn't say "My poor girl!"

EMILY. What have politics to do with happiness?

MURIEL. They have a great deal to do with mine. But, of course,

what most attracts me is all those thousands of square miles of wheat-fields, and Richard making reaping-machines for them. The day I first see one of Richard's new machines at work on a Canadian wheat-farm will be the happiest day of my life—except to-day.

NANCY [*amazed at these sentiments*]. Well, you're a caution!

MONKHURST [*with disgust*]. Why not marry an agricultural implement while you're about it?

RICHARD [*threateningly*]. You shut up!

MURIEL. But aren't you glad, Mamma?

EMILY. I can't discuss the matter now.

MURIEL. But what is there to discuss?

EMILY [*after a pause*]. Muriel, I tell you at once, both of you, I shan't allow this marriage.

MURIEL. Not allow it? My poor mamma!

MONKHURST. Certainly not.

RICHARD. I've told you to shut up once.

EMILY. And your grandfather won't allow it, either.

MURIEL. Of course, Mamma, you and I have always been devoted to each other. You've made allowances for me, and I've made allowances for you. But you must please remember that we're in the year 1912. I've promised to marry Richard, and I shall marry him. There's no question of being "allowed." And if it comes to that, why shouldn't I marry him, indeed?

EMILY. You—your father's daughter, to think of going out to Winnipeg as the wife of a—— Your place is in London.

RICHARD [*stiffening at the sight of trouble*]. But I say, Cousin Emily——

MURIEL [*gently, but firmly*]. Richard—please. [*Turning to her mother*] Mamma, you really do shock me. Just because I'm the Honourable Muriel Pym! [*Laughs.*] I won't say you're a snob, because everybody's a snob, in some way or other. But you don't understand the new spirit, not in the least—and I'm so sorry. Why! Hasn't it occurred to you even yet that the aristocracy racket's played out?

[ROSE *and* JOHN *enter by the double doors. They have both grown very old,* ROSE *being seventy-three and* JOHN *seventy-seven.* ROSE *has become short-sighted, white-haired and stoutish.* JOHN *has grown a little deaf; his hair is thin, his eyes sunken, his complexion of wax, his features sharply defined.* GERTRUDE *follows them, now seventy-three. She has grown into a thin, shrivelled old woman, erect, hard, with a high, shrill voice and keen, clear eyes.*

ROSE. Oh! It's here they seem to be collected. [*To* MONKHURST] Is that you, Gerald? Wherever has the poor lamb been?

[*She kisses him.*

MONKHURST. Grandma, congratulations. [*To* JOHN] Congratulations, sir.

JOHN [*sternly*]. Is this what you call good manners, boy?

MONKHURST. Sorry, sir. I was kept.

JOHN [*sarcastically*]. Kept?

MONKHURST. At the House of Lords. A division.

MURIEL. Good heavens! Break it to us gently. Has his grandma's lamb gone into politics?

MONKHURST [*haughtily ignoring his sister*]. They telephoned me from headquarters. I thought you would prefer me——

JOHN. Certainly, my boy. [*Shakes his hand.*] You couldn't have celebrated our golden wedding in a fashion more agreeable to us than by recording your first vote in the House of Lords. Could he, Granny?

ROSE [*feebly*]. Bless us! Bless us!

JOHN. What was the division?

MONKHURST [*mumbling*]. Er—the Trades Union Bill, sir. Third reading.

JOHN [*not hearing*]. What did you say?

MONKHURST [*louder*]. Trades Union Bill, sir.

MURIEL. Oh, my poor lamb! The Trades Union Bill division isn't to be taken till to-morrow!

MONKHURST [*hastily*]. What am I thinking of? It must have been the Extended Franchise Bill, then. . . . Anyhow, I voted.

JOHN [*coughing*]. H'm! H'm!

GERTRUDE [*drawing a shawl round her shoulders, fretfully*]. Couldn't we have that window closed?

ROSE. Auntie Gertrude, how brave you are! I daren't have asked. I declare I'm a martyr to this ventilation in my old age.

GERTRUDE. I dare say I'm very old-fashioned, but when I was young we didn't try to turn a drawing-room into a park.

ROSE [*to* RICHARD, *as he closes the window*]. Thank you, Richard.

JOHN [*pettishly*]. Put a match to the fire, boy, and have done with it.

[RICHARD *goes to the fireplace, kneels down, and lights the fire.*

GERTRUDE. What's the matter, Emily?

EMILY [*who has begun to weep*]. Oh, Auntie Gertrude!

NANCY [*soothingly*]. Come, come, Emily.

JOHN. What's that? What's that?

ROSE [*peering at* EMILY]. What is it, John?

JOHN. Monkhurst, have you been upsetting your mother again?

MURIEL. I think it's *us*, Grandpapa.

JOHN. What does she say?

MURIEL. I'm afraid it's us—Richard and me. We're engaged to be married.

[MURIEL *points to* RICHARD, *who is still on his knees busy with the fire.*

ROSE. Oh, my dear—how sudden! What a shock! What a shock! I can understand your mother crying. I must cry myself. Come and kiss me! It's astonishing how quietly you young people manage these things nowadays. [*Embraces* MURIEL.

JOHN. Who's engaged to be married? Who's engaged to be married?

RICHARD [*loudly, rising and dusting his hands*]. Muriel and I, sir.

JOHN. Mu—Mu——! What the devil do you mean, sir? Emily, what in God's name are you thinking of?

EMILY [*whimpering*]. It's just as much of a surprise to me as to anybody. I don't approve of it.

MONKHURST. I've told them already you would never approve, sir.

NANCY. You haven't, young man. It was your mother who told us that.

JOHN [*to* NANCY]. I asked you to my golden wedding, Nancy——

NANCY. You did, Sir John. I shouldn't have come without.

JOHN. Do you countenance this—affair?

NANCY. What's wrong with it?

ROSE [*timidly*]. Yes, John. What's wrong with it? Why shouldn't ny Muriel marry her Richard?

JOHN. What's wrong with it, d'you say? What——

EMILY [*passionately*]. I won't agree to it.

JOHN [*to* NANCY]. Nothing wrong with it, from your point of view. Nothing! [*Laughing*] Only I shan't have it. I won't have it.

ROSE. Grandpa, why do you always try to cross me?

JOHN. I? You?

ROSE. I've been yielding to you in everything for fifty years. I think 'm old enough to have my own way now—just once.

JOHN [*startled*]. What's come over you?

ROSE. Nothing's come over me. But I really——

JOHN [*subduing her*]. Be silent, Granny!

NANCY. We thought you thought very highly of Richard.

JOHN. So I do. But what's that got to do with it? It's nothing ut this genius business over again.

NANCY. Genius business?

JOHN. Yes. I shall be told Richard's a genius, therefore he must be llowed to marry Muriel. Nonsense! I had just the same difficulty vith her mother twenty-six years ago. You ought to remember; ou were there! Hadn't I, Emily?

EMILY [*faintly*]. Yes.

JOHN [*not hearing*]. What's that?

EMILY. Yes, Father. Yes.

JOHN. Of course I had. I wouldn't have it then, and I won't have

it now. What? Here's a young fellow, a very smart engineer. Insists on going to Canada. Wants capital! Well, I give it him! I tell him he may go. Everything's settled. And then, if you please, he calmly announces his intention of carrying off my granddaughter—him!

ROSE. If she's your granddaughter, he's my nephew.

JOHN [*glaring at her*]. Sh!

ROSE. No! I wo——

JOHN [*continuing, staring at* ROSE]. My granddaughter has got to marry something very different from an engineer.

NANCY. If she did she might marry something that'll turn her hair grey a good deal sooner.

JOHN. I have my plans for Muriel.

EMILY. Imagine Muriel in Winnipeg!

MURIEL. What plans, Granddad? You've never told me about any plans.

JOHN. Not told you! At your age, your mother had a conspicuous place in London Society. And it's your duty to carry on the family tradition. Your mother didn't marry into the peerage so that you could gallivant up and down Winnipeg as the wife of a manufacturing engineer. You have some notion of politics, though it's a mighty queer one——

MURIEL. I hardly think my politics would further your plan, Granddad. I should have supposed the whole of my career would have made it plain that I have the greatest contempt for official politics.

JOHN. Your "career"! Your "contempt"! [*Laughs good-humouredly, then more softly.*] My child——

MURIEL [*nettled*]. I'm not a child.

JOHN [*angrily*]. Enough! Don't make yourself ridiculous. [*More quietly*] Your mother and your brother think as I do. Let that suffice.

RICHARD. Pardon me, sir, but suppose it won't suffice?

JOHN [*furious*]. I—I——

MURIEL [*violently*]. Granddad, do please keep calm.

JOHN [*as above*]. I'm perfectly calm, I believe.

NANCY [*to* GERTRUDE]. Then he'd believe anything!

MURIEL. You don't seem to have understood that we're engaged to be married.

GERTRUDE. I must say——

JOHN. And what must *you* say? You'll side with my wife against me and the girl's own mother, I suppose?

GERTRUDE. I fail to see any objection whatever.

JOHN. Do you, indeed! Well, objection or no objection, I mean it to be stopped—now, at once.

MURIEL. But how shall you stop it, Granddad?

JOHN. If I hear one more word of this, one more word—there'll be

o thirty thousand pounds for Richard. Not from me, at any rate. nd I don't imagine that your mother will help him, or Monkhurst ither. Where is he?

MONKHURST Not much.

MURIEL. But that won't stop it, Granddad!

ROSE [*rising, and going to the hall door*]. John, you're a hard, hard old nan. The one thing I ask of you, and on our golden-wedding day, too, nd you won't even listen. You shut me up as though I were a—a—— do think it's a shame. The poor things! [*She goes out in tears.*

NANCY [*hurrying out after her*]. Rose! Rose! Don't!

JOHN. Here I arrange a nice little family dinner to celebrate the ccasion. I invite no outsiders, so that we shall be nice and homely and omfortable. And this is how you treat me. You induce your grand- nother to defy me—the first time in her life. You bring your mother o tears, and you——

EMILY. There's nothing to be said in favour of it—nothing. The ery thought of it——

RICHARD. I'm awfully sorry.

JOHN. No, you aren't, sir. So don't be impudent.

[WEBSTER *enters.*

WEBSTER. Mr Arthur Preece, Sir John. I've shown him into the tudy.

JOHN. Very good. [WEBSTER *goes out.*

GERTRUDE. Why can't Mr Preece come up here?

JOHN. Because he's come to see me on private business, madam. rivate, do I say? It's public enough. Everybody knows that I can't eep my own workmen in order without the help of a Labour M.P. he country's going to the dogs! My own father used to say so, and never believed him. But it's true. [*He goes to the door.*

MONKHURST. May I come with you, sir? [*With a superior glance at* MURIEL] These family ructions——

JOHN. Come! [JOHN *goes off, followed by* MONKHURST.

GERTRUDE [*meaningly*]. Richard, go and see where your mother is, ill you? [RICHARD *follows the others. A slight pause.*

EMILY [*still weakly and tearfully*]. How your poor grandmother is pset!

MURIEL. Yes, I'm very sorry.

EMILY. That's something.

MURIEL. It's such a humiliating sight. No real arguments. No ttempt to understand *my* point of view! Nothing but blustering nd bullying and stamping up and down. He wants to make out that m still a child with no will of my own. But it's he who's the child.

GERTRUDE. Come, come, Muriel.

MURIEL. Yes, it is. A spoilt child! When anything happens that

doesn't just please him there's a fine exhibition of temper. Don't we all know it! And this is the great Sir John Rhead! Bah!

EMILY [*amazed*]. Muriel!

MURIEL. Oh, of course it isn't his fault! Every one's always given him his own way—especially Grandma. It's positively pathetic; Grandma trying to turn against him now. Poor old thing! As if she could! Now!

EMILY. Muriel, your cold-bloodedness absolutely frightens me.

MURIEL. But, Mother, I'm not cold-blooded. It's only common sense.

GERTRUDE [*clumsily caressing* EMILY]. Darling!

EMILY. Common sense will be the finish of me; I've no one left in the world now.

GERTRUDE [*hurt*]. Then I suppose I'm too old to count. And yet for nearly fifty years I've lived for nobody but you. Many and many a time I should have been ready to die—yes, glad to—only you were there.

EMILY [*affectionately*]. And yet you're against me now.

GERTRUDE. I only want you not to have any regrets.

EMILY. Any regrets! My life has been all regrets. Look at me.

GERTRUDE. Not all your life, dear—your marriage.

[MURIEL *looks up.*

EMILY [*firmly, and yet frightened, with a look at* MURIEL]. Hush, Auntie!

GERTRUDE. Why? Why should I hush? You say your life's been all regrets. If you care about being honest with Muriel, you ought to tell her now that you did not marry the man you were in love with.

EMILY [*in an outburst*]. Don't believe it, Muriel. No one could have been a kinder husband than your father was, and I always loved him.

MURIEL [*intimidated by these revelations of feeling*]. Mother!

GERTRUDE. Then what do you regret? You had an affection for Ned, but if you had loved him as you loved—the other one—what is there to regret? And now you seem to be doing your best to make regrets for Muriel—and—and—oh, Emily, why do you do it?

MURIEL [*moved, but controlling herself*]. Yes, Mamma! Why? I'm sure I'm open to hear reason on any subject—even marriage.

EMILY [*blackly*]. Reason! Reason! There you are again! My child, you're my eldest, and I've loved you beyond everybody. You've never been attached to me. It isn't your fault, and I don't blame you. Things happen to be like that, that's all. You don't know how hard you are. If you did, you'd be ready to bite your tongue off. Here I am, with you and Gerald. Gerald is not bad at heart, but he's selfish and he's a fool. I could never talk freely to him as I do to you. One day he'll be asking me to leave Berkeley Square, and I shall go and

finish my days in the country. And here you calmly announce you're off to Canada, and you want my *reasons* for objecting! There's only one reason—all the others are nothing—mere excuses—and you couldn't guess that one reason. You have to be told. If you cared for me, you wouldn't force me to the shame of telling you.

MURIEL [*whispering*]. Shame?

EMILY. Isn't it humiliating for a mother to have to tell her daughter, who never's even thought of it, that she cannot bear to lose her—cannot bear?—Canada!

MURIEL [*throwing herself at her mother's knees*]. Mother, I'll never leave you! [*She sobs, burying her face in her mother's lap.*

GERTRUDE [*softly*]. All this self-sacrifice is a sad mistake. [*To* MURIEL] None of us can live for ever. When your mother is gone—what will you do then?

MURIEL [*climbing up and kissing her mother*]. I'll never leave you!

EMILY. My child!

GERTRUDE [*gently*]. It's wrong of you, Emily! All wrong!

[ARTHUR PREECE *enters the hall. His hair and moustache have grown grey. His expression and manner are slightly disillusioned and cynical. In figure he is the same.*

PREECE. Good evening.

MURIEL [*on seeing him, rises quickly rather like a schoolgirl*]. Good evening. [*She goes out rapidly.* PREECE *looks after her a little surprised.*

EMILY [*at once the woman of the world*]. Good evening. You've soon finished your business with Father.

PREECE [*puzzled by the appearance of things*]. Good evening. [*He shakes hands with* EMILY.] What is the matter? The old gentleman really wasn't equal to seeing me. I just told him what I had to tell him about the strikers, and then he said I'd perhaps better come up here. I think he wanted to be alone.

EMILY. Poor dear!

PREECE. Nothing serious, I hope?

GERTRUDE [*briskly, shaking* PREECE *by the hand*]. The usual thing, Mr Preece, the usual thing! A new generation has got to the marrying age. You know what it is. I know what it is. Now, Emily, don't begin to cry again. People who behave as selfishly as you're doing have no right to weep—except for their sins.

EMILY [*protesting*]. Auntie, this can't possibly interest Mr Preece.

GERTRUDE [*still more briskly*]. Don't talk that kind of conventional nonsense, Emily! You know quite well it *will* interest Mr Preece extremely. [*Rising*] Now just tell him all about it and see what he says. [*With a peculiar tone*] I suppose you'll admit he ought to be a good judge of such matters? [*She moves to the door.*

EMILY. Where are you going?

GERTRUDE [*imitating* EMILY *slightly*]. That can't possibly interest you. [*Wearily*] I'm out of patience. [*She goes out of the room.*

EMILY [*trying to force a light tone*]. I hope you had some good news about the workmen for my poor old father. What a finish for his golden-wedding day!

PREECE [*following her lead*]. Yes, I think his little affair's pretty well fixed up—anyhow for the present. He's shown himself pretty reasonable. If he'd continued to be as obstinate as he was at the start, the thing would have run him into a lot of money.

EMILY. I wonder he doesn't retire.

PREECE. He's going to. There's to be a Limited Company.

EMILY. Father—a Limited Company! He told you?

PREECE. Yes.

EMILY. Then he must have been feeling it's getting too much for him.

PREECE. Well, considering his years—seventy-seven, isn't it? Some of us will be beaten long before that age. [*He sighs.*

EMILY. Why that sigh? *You* aren't getting ready to give up, are you?

PREECE. No, I expect I shall go on till I drop.

EMILY. I should have thought you had every reason to be satisfied with what you have done.

PREECE. Why?

EMILY. Unless you regret giving up steel for politics

PREECE. No. I don't regret that. I'd done all I really wanted to do there. I'd forced your father to take up steel on a big scale. I'd made more than all the money I needed. And other processes were coming along, better than mine.

EMILY. I wonder how many men there are who've succeeded as you have done, both in politics and out of politics.

PREECE. Do you think I've succeeded in politics?

EMILY. You haven't held office, but I've always understood it was because you preferred to be independent.

PREECE. It was. I could have sold my soul over and over again for a seat at an Under-Secretary's desk. I wouldn't even lead the Labour Party.

EMILY. But every one knows you're the strongest man in the Labour Party.

PREECE. Well, if I am—the strongest man in the Labour Party is rather depressed.

EMILY. Why?

PREECE. Difficult to say. Twenty years ago I thought the millennium would be just about established in 1912. Instead of that, it's as far off as ever. It's even farther off.

EMILY. Farther off?

PREECE. Yes. And yet a lot of us have worked. By God, we have! But there's a different spirit now. The men are bitter. They can't lead themselves and they won't be led. They won't be led. And nobody knows what's going to happen next. Except that trouble's going to happen. I often wonder why I was cursed with the reforming spirit. How much happier I should have been if I'd cared for nothing in this world but my own work—like young Richard Sibley, for instance.

EMILY. Isn't he interested in reform?

PREECE. Not he! He's an engineer, only an engineer. He minds his own business. I suppose he's here to-night?

EMILY. Yes.

PREECE [*in an ordinary tone*]. Why won't you let him marry Miss Muriel?

EMILY [*startled*]. Then Father's told you?

PREECE. Not a word. But Richard and I are great pals. He's told me his plans. Why shouldn't they marry?

EMILY [*weakly*]. Muriel won't go to Canada.

PREECE. Won't go to Canada? But I understand she had a tremendous notion of Canada.

EMILY. She's promised me she won't go.

PREECE. But why should she do that?

EMILY [*half breaking down*]. Oh, I know I'm selfish. But—but—I should be quite alone, if she went. And then, it's not what we'd anticipated for her. We naturally hoped——

PREECE. Oh! Of course, if you're in the marriage market——

EMILY. No. Really it's not that—at least as far as I'm concerned. I should be so utterly alone. And she's promised me. If she deserted me——

PREECE. Deserted—rather a strong word——

EMILY. Please don't be hard! You don't know how unhappy I am. You admit you're discouraged.

PREECE. I said "depressed."

EMILY. Well, depressed, then. Can't you feel for others?

PREECE [*rather roughly*]. And who made me admit it? Who kept questioning me and worming it out of me? You wouldn't leave it alone. You're like all the other women—and I've had to do with a few.

EMILY [*affronted*]. Please——

PREECE. It isn't sufficient for you to make a man unhappy. You aren't satisfied till he admits you've made him unhappy.

EMILY [*protesting*]. Oh!

PREECE. How many times have I seen you since this cursed strike brought me among the family again? Half a dozen, perhaps. And every single time I've noticed you feeling your way towards it. And to-night you've just got there.

EMILY. Arthur, you must forgive me. It's quite true. We can't help it.

PREECE. What should I care about lost millenniums and labour troubles ahead, if I'd any genuine personal interest of my own? Not a jot! Not a tinker's curse! Do you remember you let me kiss you—once?

EMILY. Forgive me! I know I oughtn't to be forgiven. But life's so difficult. Ever since I've been seeing you again I've realized how miserable I am—it's such a long time since. It seems as it was some other girl and not me—twenty-six years ago—here! And yet it's like yesterday. [*She sobs.*

[PREECE *embraces her first roughly and then very tenderly.*

PREECE. My child!

EMILY. I'm an old woman.

PREECE. You said it was like yesterday—when you were twenty-three—so it is. [*They kiss again.*

EMILY [*with a little laugh*]. This will kill Father.

PREECE. Not it. Your father has a remarkable constitution. It's much more likely to kill the Labour Party.

[JOHN *enters, agitated and weary.*

JOHN [*brusquely*]. Where's your mother? She's not in the other room. I thought she was in here. I want to see her.

EMILY. She's probably gone to her own room—poor dear!

JOHN. Can't you go and find her? [*He sits down, discouraged.*

EMILY [*coming over to him*]. Father, I've been thinking it over, and I'm afraid we shall have to agree to Muriel's marriage.

JOHN. We shall have to agree to it? I shan't agree to it.

EMILY. As Mr Preece says——

JOHN. Mr Preece?

EMILY. You know how friendly he is with Richard—as Mr Preece says, why shouldn't they marry?

PREECE. I merely ventured to put the question, Sir John.

JOHN. Why shouldn't they? Because they shouldn't. Isn't that enough? [*To* EMILY] A quarter of an hour ago you yourself agreed in the most positive way that there was nothing whatever to be said in favour of such a match.

EMILY. I was rather overlooking the fact that they're in love with each other—[*glancing at* PREECE]—a quarter of an hour ago.

JOHN. Are all you women gone mad to-night? Preece, do you reckon *you* understand women?

PREECE. Now and then one gets a glimpse, sir.

JOHN [*realizing state of affairs between* PREECE *and* EMILY]. H'm!

EMILY [*noticing her father watch her, rather self-consciously*]. After all, what difference can it make to us? We shan't be here as long as they will.

JOHN. What? What?

EMILY [*louder*]. We shan't be here as long as they will, I say.

JOHN. That's it! Tell me I'm an old man! Of course, it can't make any difference to us. I was looking at the matter solely from their point of view. How can it affect me—*whom* Muriel marries?

EMILY. Well, then! Let them judge for themselves. You agree?

[JOHN *stares before him obstinately.*

Father——

[JOHN *shakes his head impatiently.*

Dad!

JOHN [*looking up like a sulky child*]. Oh, have it your own way. I'm not the girl's mother. If you've made up your mind, there's nothing more to be said.

EMILY. And Richard's capital?

JOHN. Oh, it's all lying ready. [*Shrugs his shoulders.*] May as well have it, I suppose.

EMILY. You're a dear!

JOHN. I'm not a dear, and I hate to be called a dear.

EMILY. What a shocking untruth! I shall go and tell them, I think.

[*She goes to the door.*

JOHN [*calling her back*]. Emily!

EMILY. Yes.

JOHN. Don't let them come in here. I couldn't bear it.

EMILY Oh, but——

JOHN. I couldn't stand the strain of another scene. It's late now—I'm an old man, and people have no right to upset me in this way.

EMILY. Couldn't they just say good-night?

JOHN. Very well. They must just say good-night and go at once. Another day——

EMILY [*very soothingly*]. I'll tell them you're very tired.

[*She nods smilingly at her father and leaves the room.*

[*A slight pause.*

PREECE. A difficult job, being the head of a family.

JOHN. I've done with it, Preece. I've decided that to-night—that's what a golden wedding comes to in these days. Things aren't what they were. In my time a man was at any rate master in his own house and on his works. Seemed natural enough! But you've changed all that.

PREECE. I've changed it?

JOHN [*continuing confidentially*]. Why, even my own wife's gone against me to-night. My own wife! [*Troubled*] Did you ever hear of such a thing?

PREECE. I *have* heard of it, Sir John.

JOHN [*grimly*]. You laugh. Wait till you're married.

PREECE. I may have to wait a long time.

JOHN. Eh, what? A long time? Don't try to hoodwink me, Preece.

I know what you all say when I'm not there. "Old Rhead." "Be breaking up soon, the old man!" But I'm not yet quite doddering. [*Pointedly*] You'll be married inside six months—and every newspaper in London will be full of it. Yes, answer that. My workmen go out on strike, and you poke your nose in and arrange it for me. Then my family go out on strike, and, upon my soul, you poke your damned nose in there too and arrange that for me—on your own terms. Tut—tut! Shake hands, man! You and your like are running the world to the devil, and I'm too old to step in and knock you down. But—but—I wish you luck, my lad. You're a good sort. [*They shake hands.*

[EMILY, NANCY, MURIEL, RICHARD, *and* GERTRUDE *all enter from the hall.*

PREECE. Well, good night, Sir John.

EMILY [*cheerfully*]. We're just coming to say good-night, Grandpapa. I'm sure you must be very tired. We've said good-night to Granny.

JOHN [*feebly*]. Where is she? Where is Granny?

NANCY [*heartily, shaking hands*]. Good night, John, and thank you for a very pleasant time.

[*She goes to* GERTRUDE, *who now stands near the door, and kisses her good-night.*

RICHARD [*heartily shaking hands*]. Thank you, sir.

[NANCY *passes out by the door.*

[GERTRUDE *now shakes hands with* RICHARD, *who follows his mother.*

EMILY [*kisses* JOHN]. Good night, dear.

[JOHN, *turning from* EMILY, *moves with a generous gesture to* MURIEL, *who, however, keeps a very stiff demeanour and shakes hands in cold silence.* EMILY *has reached* GERTRUDE. *They both watch* MURIEL.

EMILY [*with a shade of disappointment turns to* GERTRUDE]. Good night, Auntie.

[GERTRUDE *and* EMILY *embrace, then* EMILY *passes quickly out of the door.*

JOHN [*stiffly, looking about*]. Where's Monkhurst?

GERTRUDE. Oh, he is gone! He said he had an appointment at the Club.

JOHN. What Club? The Carlton?

MURIEL [*shaking hands with* GERTRUDE]. The Automobile, you may depend. [*She goes off by the door quickly.*

GERTRUDE. Well, this day is over. [WEBSTER *enters from the hall.*

WEBSTER. Any orders, Sir John?

JOHN. None.

GERTRUDE. Can't we have some of the blaze of electricity turned off?

JOHN. As you like.

[WEBSTER *extinguishes several clusters with the switches at the door, then goes out. The room is left in a discreet light.*

JOHN [*almost plaintively*]. Where's Rose?

[ROSE *enters timidly from the hall.*

GERTRUDE. Here she is.

ROSE [*going up to* JOHN]. John, forgive me for having dared to differ from my dear husband.

JOHN [*taking her hand softly*]. Old girl—[*then half humorously shaking his head*]—you'll be the death of me, if you do it again.

GERTRUDE. I think I'm going to bed.

JOHN. No, not yet.

ROSE. Gertrude, will you do me a favour on my golden-wedding day?

GERTRUDE. What is it?

ROSE. Sing for us.

GERTRUDE. Oh! My singing days are over long ago.

JOHN [*persuasively*]. Go on—go on. There's nobody but us to hear.

GERTRUDE. Really it is—— [*Stops.*] Very well.

[GERTRUDE *goes through the double doors.* ROSE *draws her lace shawl round her.*

JOHN. Let's sit by the fire if you're cold.

[*He moves a chair in place for her gallantly.* ROSE *sits to the right of the fire.* JOHN *takes a seat to the left of the fire. The song "Juanita" is heard in a cracked and ancient voice, very gently and faintly.*

ROSE [*softly, by the fire*]. When I think of all this room has seen——

JOHN [*looking into the fire*]. Ah!

ROSE. I'm sure it's very pleasant to remember.

JOHN. Ah! That's because you're pleasant. I've said it before, and I say it again. The women of to-day aren't what women used to be. They're hard. They've none of the old charm. Unsexed—that's what they are—unsexed.

[MURIEL *enters quickly from the hall in a rich white cloak. She pauses, smiling, then hurries delicately across to her grandfather and embraces him; releases him, shyly takes a flower from her bosom, drops it into his hand, turns and gives her grandmother a smile, whispering "Good night. They're waiting for me," and hurries out again.*

JOHN [*looking at the flower*]. We live and learn.

ROSE [*nodding her head*]. Yes, John. [*The song continues.*

# CASTE

## By T. W. ROBERTSON

*First produced at the Prince of Wales's Royal Theatre, London, April 6, 1867*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

| | |
|---|---|
| Hon. George D'Alroy | Dixon |
| Captain Hawtree | Marquise de St Maur |
| Eccles | Esther Eccles |
| Sam Gerridge | Polly Eccles |

Act I. *The Little House in Stangate.* Courtship.
*A lapse of eight months.*
Act II. *The Lodgings in Mayfair.* Matrimony.
*A lapse of twelve months.*
Act III. *The Little House in Stangate.* Widowhood.

THE modern audience that is capable of appreciating the plays of Shaw, Galsworthy, or Maugham has little patience for the theatre of T. W. Robertson. The theme of *Caste*—fond hearts and coronets—is by no means out of date, but the play, first produced in 1867, seems strangely remote from actuality. It is necessary to remember that Robertson was an audacious pioneer in his day. He led the revolt against unreality and sentimentalism of the stage, and showed men that life could be brought into the theatre. He rebelled against stilted speech and forced emotion, replaced melodramatic vapourings with conversation which was more free and natural, and boldly handled the urgent problems of his day as matter for dramatic exposition.

In short, Robertson started a new movement in the theatre, and, be it noted, he was working some years before Ibsen was known and his influence felt upon the English stage. The work he began was consolidated by Pinero, Jones, and Grundy. If Robertson seems an anachronism to-day, it is precisely because his successors have continued the excellent work which he began half a century ago.

"Robertson," says a distinguished critic, "has no particular axe to grind, for he is no revolutionary. His creed is essentially Victorian;

he never tires of informing us that East is East and West is West, that classes never should mingle, that the working man should learn to stay in his appointed place and the *bourgeoisie* have no yearnings to intrude into the often impoverished drawing-rooms and libraries of Aristocrat Castle. In this way Robertson must have been entirely in accord with the sentiments of the larger moiety of his audience; but his satire is none the less present, and he faces, if in no very profound manner, the social problems of his day."

# ACT I

SCENE: *A room in a little house in Stangate. The door is right; the fireplace left; the window, which gives a view of iron railings and a mean street, at back. To the left of the window is a bookshelf, and a small table on which are ballet-shoes, skirts, etc. Framed theatrical portraits on walls. An old carpet and rug on floor. A long table in middle of room. Bureau against wall on right, by the door. Several plain chairs. A cupboard in the recess beyond the fireplace. Kettle on hob. Fire laid. Box of matches and ornaments on mantelshelf.*

*Rapping heard at door, the handle is then shaken as curtain rises. The door is unlocked. Enter* GEORGE D'ALROY.

GEORGE. Told you so; the key was left under the mat in case I came. They're not back from rehearsal. [*Hangs up hat on peg near door as* HAWTREE *enters.*] Confound rehearsal! [*Crosses to fireplace.*

HAWTREE [*centre of stage, back to audience, looking round*]. And this is the fairy's bower!

GEORGE. Yes! And this is the fairy's fireplace; the fire is laid. I'll light it. [*Lights fire with lucifer from mantelpiece.*

HAWTREE [*turning to* GEORGE]. And this is the abode rendered blessed by her abiding. It is here that she dwells, walks, talks—eats and drinks. Does she eat and drink?

GEORGE. Yes, heartily. I've seen her.

HAWTREE. And you are really spoons!—case of true love—hit—dead.

GEORGE. Right through. Can't live away from her.
[*With elbow on end of mantelpiece.*

HAWTREE. Poor old Dal! and you've brought me over the water to——

GEORGE. Stangate.

HAWTREE. Stangate—to see her for the same sort of reason that when a patient is in a dangerous state one doctor calls in another—for a consultation.

GEORGE. Yes. Then the patient dies.

HAWTREE. Tell us all about it—you know I've been away.
[*Sits on a chair.*

GEORGE. Well, then, eighteen months ago——

HAWTREE. Oh, cut that; you told me all about that. You went to a theatre, and saw a girl in a ballet, and you fell in love.

GEORGE. Yes. I found out that she was an amiable, good girl.

HAWTREE. Of course; cut that. We'll credit her with all the virtues and accomplishments.

GEORGE. Who worked hard to support a drunken father.

HAWTREE. Oh! the father's a drunkard, is he? The father does not inherit the daughter's virtues?

GEORGE. No. I hate him.

HAWTREE. Naturally Quite so! quite so!

GEORGE. And she—that is, Esther—is very good to her younger sister.

HAWTREE. Younger sister also angelic, amiable, accomplished, *et cetera, et cetera.*

GEORGE. Um—good enough, but got a temper—large temper. Well, with some difficulty I got to speak to her. I mean to Esther. Then I was allowed to see her to her door here.

HAWTREE. I know—pastrycooks—Richmond dinner—and all that.

GEORGE. You're too fast. Pastrycooks—yes. Richmond—no. Your knowledge of the world, fifty yards round barracks, misleads you. I saw her nearly every day, and I kept on falling in love—falling and falling, till I thought I should never reach the bottom; then I met you.

HAWTREE. I remember the night when you told me; but I thought it was only an *amourette*. However, if the fire is a conflagration, subdue it; try dissipation.

GEORGE. I have.

HAWTREE. What success?

GEORGE. None; dissipation brought me bad health and self-contempt, a sick head and a sore heart.

HAWTREE. Foreign travel; absence makes the heart grow [*slight pause*]—stronger. Get leave and cut away.

GEORGE. I did get leave, and I did cut away; and while away, I was miserable and a gone-er coon than ever.

HAWTREE. What's to be done?

[*Sits cross-legged on chair, facing* GEORGE.

GEORGE. Don't know. That's the reason I asked you to come over and see.

HAWTREE. Of course, Dal, you're not such a soft as to think of marriage. You know what your mother is. Either you are going to behave properly, with a proper regard for the world, and all that, you know; or you're going to do the other thing. Now, the question is, what do you mean to do? The girl is a nice girl, no doubt; but as to your making her Mrs D'Alroy, the thing is out of the question.

GEORGE. Why? What should prevent me?

HAWTREE. Caste!—the inexorable law of caste! The social law, so becoming and so good, that commands like to mate with like, and forbids a giraffe to fall in love with a squirrel.

GEORGE. But, my dear Bark——

HAWTREE. My dear Dal, all those marriages of people with common people are all very well in novels and in plays on the stage, because the

real people don't exist, and have no relatives who exist, and no connections, and so no harm's done, and it's rather interesting to look at; but in real life, with real relations and real mothers, and so forth, it's absolute bosh. It's worse—it's utter social and personal annihilation and damnation.

GEORGE. As to my mother, I haven't thought about her.

[*Sits on corner of table.*

HAWTREE. Of course not. Lovers are so damned selfish; they never think of anybody but themselves.

GEORGE. My father died when I was three years old, and she married again before I was six, and married a Frenchman.

HAWTREE. A nobleman of the most ancient families in France, of equal blood to her own. She obeyed the duties imposed on her by her station and by caste.

GEORGE. Still, it caused a separation and a division between us, and I never see my brother, because he lives abroad. Of course the Marquise de St Maur is my mother, and I look upon her with a sort of superstitious awe.

HAWTREE. She's a grand Brahmin priestess.

GEORGE. Just so; and I know I'm a fool. Now you're clever, Bark—a little too clever, I think. You're paying your *devoirs*—that's the correct word, isn't it?—to Lady Florence Carberry, the daughter of a countess. She's above you—you've no title. Is she to forget *her* caste?

HAWTREE. That argument doesn't apply. A man can be no more than a gentleman.

GEORGE.

"True hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

HAWTREE. Now, George, if you're going to consider this question from the point of view of poetry, you're off to No Man's Land, where I won't follow you.

GEORGE. No gentleman can be ashamed of the woman he loves. No matter what her original station, once his wife he raises her to his rank.

HAWTREE. Yes, he raises her—*her*; but her connections—her relatives. How about them?

ECCLES [*outside*]. Polly! Polly! [*Enters.*] Why the devil——

[GEORGE *crosses to* HAWTREE, *who rises.* ECCLES *sees them, and assumes a deferential manner.*

ECCLES. Oh, Mr De-Alroy! I didn't see you, sir. Good afternoon; the same to you, sir, and many on 'em. [*Puts hat on bureau.*

HAWTREE. Who is this?

GEORGE. This is Papa.

HAWTREE. Ah!

[*Turns up to bookshelf, scanning* ECCLES *through eyeglass.*

GEORGE. Miss Eccles and her sister not returned from rehearsal yet?

ECCLES. No, sir, they have not. I expect 'em in directly. I hope you've been quite well since I seen you last, sir?

GEORGE. Quite, thank you; and how have you been, Mr Eccles?

ECCLES. Well, sir, I have not been the thing at all. My 'elth, sir, and my spirits is both broke. I'm not the man I used to be. I am not accustomed to this sort of thing. I've seen better days, but they are gone—most like for ever. It is a melancholy thing, sir, for a man of my time of life to look back on better days that are gone most like for ever.

GEORGE. I dare say.

ECCLES. Once proud and prosperous, now poor and lowly. Once master of a shop, I am now, by the pressure of circumstances over which I have no control, driven to seek work and not to find it. Poverty is a dreadful thing, sir, for a man as has once been well off.

GEORGE. I dare say.

ECCLES [*sighing*]. Ah, sir, the poor and lowly is often 'ardly used. What chance has the working man?

HAWTREE. None when he don't work.

ECCLES. We are all equal in mind and feeling.

GEORGE [*aside*]. I hope not.

ECCLES. I am sorry, gentlemen, that I cannot offer you any refreshment; but luxury and me has long been strangers.

GEORGE. I am very sorry for your misfortunes, Mr Eccles. [*Looking round at* HAWTREE, *who turns away*] May I hope that you will allow me to offer you this trifling loan? [*Giving him a half-sovereign.*

ECCLES. Sir, you're a gentleman. One can tell a real gentleman with half a sov—I mean with half a eye—a real gentleman understands the natural emotions of the working man. Pride, sir, is a thing as should be put down by the strong 'and of pecuniary necessity. There's a friend of mine round the corner as I promised to meet on a little matter of business; so, if you will excuse me, sir——

GEORGE. With pleasure.

ECCLES [*going toward door*]. Sorry to leave you, gentlemen, but——

GEORGE. } Don't stay on my account.

HAWTREE. } Don't mention it.

ECCLES. Business is business. The girls will be in directly. Good afternoon, gentlemen—good afternoon—[*going out*]—good afternoon! [*Exit.*

HAWTREE [*coming down left of table*]. Papa is not nice, but [*sitting on corner of table, down stage*]

> "True hearts are more than coronets,
> And simple faith than Norman blood."

Poor George! I wonder what your mamma—the Most Noble the

Marquise de St Maur—would think of Papa Eccles. Come, Dal, allow that there *is something* in caste. Conceive that dirty ruffian—that rinsing of stale beer—that walking tap-room, for a father-in-law. Take a spin to Central America. Forget her.

GEORGE. Can't.

HAWTREE. You'll be wretched and miserable with her.

GEORGE. I'd rather be wretched with her, than miserable without her. [HAWTREE *takes out cigar-case.*] Don't smoke here!

HAWTREE. Why not?

GEORGE. She'll be coming in directly.

HAWTREE. I don't think she'd mind.

GEORGE I should. Do you smoke before Lady Florence Carberry?

HAWTREE [*closing case*]. Ha! You're suffering from a fit of the morals.

GEORGE. What's that?

HAWTREE. The morals is a disease like the measles, that attacks the young and innocent.

GEORGE [*with temper*]. You talk like Mephistopheles, without the cleverness. [*Goes up to window, and looks at watch.*

HAWTREE [*arranging cravat at glass*]. I don't pretend to be a particularly good sort of fellow, nor a particularly bad sort of fellow. I suppose I'm about the average standard sort of thing, and I don't like to see a friend go downhill to the devil while I can put the drag on. [*Turning, with back to fire*] Here is a girl of very humble station—poor and all that, with a drunken father, who evidently doesn't care how he gets money so long as he don't work for it. Marriage! Pah! Couldn't the thing be arranged?

GEORGE. Hawtree, cut that! [*At window*] She's here!

[*Goes to door and opens it.*

[*Enter* ESTHER.

GEORGE [*flurried at sight of her*]. Good morning. I got here before you, you see.

ESTHER. Good morning.

[*Sees* HAWTREE. *Slight pause, in which* HAWTREE *has removed his hat.*

GEORGE. I've taken the liberty—I hope you won't be angry—of asking you to let me present a friend of mine to you: Miss Eccles—Captain Hawtree.

[HAWTREE *bows.* GEORGE *assists* ESTHER *in taking off bonnet and shawl.*

HAWTREE [*aside*]. Pretty.

ESTHER [*aside*]. Thinks too much of himself.

GEORGE [*hangs up bonnet and shawl on pegs*]. You've had a late rehearsal. Where's Polly?

ESTHER. She stayed behind to buy something. [*Enter* POLLY.

POLLY. Hallo! [*Head through door.*] How de do, Mr D'Alroy? Oh, I'm tired to death! Kept at rehearsal by an old fool of a stage manager. But stage managers are always old fools—except when they are young. We shan't have time for any dinner, so I've brought something for tea.

ESTHER. What is it?

POLLY. Ham. [*Showing ham in paper.* ESTHER *sits at window. Seeing* HAWTREE] Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. I didn't see you.

GEORGE. A friend of mine, Mary. Captain Hawtree—Miss Mary Eccles. [GEORGE *sits opposite* ESTHER *at window.*

[POLLY *bows very low, half burlesquely, to* HAWTREE.

HAWTREE. Charmed.

POLLY [*aside*]. What a swell! Got nice teeth, and he knows it. How quiet we all are; let's talk about something.

[*Hangs up her hat. She crosses to fire.* HAWTREE *crosses and places hat on bureau.*

ESTHER. What can we talk about?

POLLY. Anything. Ham. Mr D'Alroy, do you like ham?

GEORGE. I adore her—[POLLY *titters*]—I mean I adore it.

POLLY [*to* HAWTREE, *who is watching* POLLY *undo paper containing the ham. She turns the plate on top of the ham still in the paper, then throws the paper aside and triumphantly brings the plate under* HAWTREE's *nose,* HAWTREE *giving a little start back.*] Do you like ham, sir?

[*Very tragically.*

HAWTREE. Yes.

POLLY. Now, that is very strange. I should have thought you'd have been above ham. [*Getting tea-tray.*

HAWTREE. May one ask why?

POLLY. You look above it. You look quite equal to tongue—glazed. [*Laughing*] Mr D'Alroy is here so often that he knows our ways.

[*Getting tea-things from sideboard and placing them on table.*

HAWTREE. I like everything that is piquant and fresh, and pretty and agreeable.

POLLY [*laying table all the time for tea*]. Ah! you mean that for me. [*Curtseying*] Oh! [*Sings.*] Tra, la, lal, la, la, la. [*Flourishes cup in his face; he retreats a step.*] Now I must put the kettle on. [GEORGE *and* ESTHER *are at window.*] Esther never does any work when Mr D'Alroy is here. They're spooning; ugly word 'spooning,' isn't it?—reminds one of red-currant jam. By the by, love *is* very like red-currant jam—at the first taste, sweet, and afterwards shuddery. Do you ever spoon?

HAWTREE [*leaning across table*]. I should like to do so at this moment.

POLLY. I dare say you would. No, you're too grand for me. You want taking down a peg—I mean a foot. Let's see—what are you—a corporal?

HAWTREE. Captain.

POLLY. I prefer a corporal. See here. Let's change about. You be corporal—it'll do you good, and I'll be 'my lady.'

HAWTREE. Pleasure.

POLLY. You must call me 'my lady,' though, or you shan't have any ham.

HAWTREE. Certainly, 'my lady'; but I cannot accept your hospitality, for I'm engaged to dine.

POLLY. At what time?

HAWTREE. Seven.

POLLY. Seven! Why, that's half-past tea-time. Now, Corporal, you must wait on me.

HAWTREE. As the pages did of old.

POLLY. My lady.

HAWTREE. My lady.

POLLY. Here's the kettle, Corporal.

[*Holding out kettle at arm's length.* HAWTREE *looks at it through eyeglass.*

HAWTREE. Very nice kettle!

POLLY. Take it into the back kitchen.

HAWTREE. Eh!

POLLY. Oh! I'm coming too.

HAWTREE. Ah! that alters the case.

[*He takes out handkerchief and then takes hold of kettle—crosses to right as* GEORGE *rises and comes down, slapping* HAWTREE *on back.* HAWTREE *immediately places kettle on the floor.* POLLY *throws herself into chair by fireside and roars with laughter.* GEORGE *and* ESTHER *laugh.*

GEORGE. What are you about?

HAWTREE. I'm about to fill the kettle.

ESTHER [*going to* POLLY]. Mind what you are doing, Polly! What will Sam say?

POLLY. Whatever Sam chooses. What the sweetheart don't see the husband can't grieve at. Now then—Corporal!

HAWTREE. My lady! [*Takes up kettle.*

POLLY. Attention! Forward! March! and mind the soot don't drop upon your trousers. [*Exeunt* POLLY *and* HAWTREE, HAWTREE *first.*

ESTHER. What a girl it is—all spirits! The worst is that it is so easy to mistake her.

GEORGE. And so easy to find out your mistake. But why won't you let me present you with a piano?

ESTHER. I don't want one.

GEORGE. You said you were fond of playing.

ESTHER. We may be fond of many things without having them.

[*Leaning against end of table. Taking out letter*] Now, here is a gentleman says that he is attached to me.

GEORGE [*jealous*]. May I know his name?

ESTHER. What for? It would be useless, as his solicitations——

[*Throws letter into fire.*

GEORGE. I lit that fire.

ESTHER. Then burn these too. [GEORGE *crosses to fire.*] No, not that. [*Taking one back*] I must keep that; burn the others

[GEORGE *throws letter on fire, crosses back of table quickly—takes hat from peg and goes to door as if leaving hurriedly. He hesitates at door, shuts it quickly, hangs his hat up again, and comes back to* ESTHER, *who has seated herself.*

GEORGE. Who is that from?

ESTHER. Why do you wish to know?

GEORGE. Because I love you, and I don't think you love me, and I fear a rival.

ESTHER. You have none.

GEORGE. I know you have so many admirers.

ESTHER. They're nothing to me.

GEORGE. Not one?

ESTHER. No. They're admirers, but there's not a husband among them.

GEORGE. Not the writer of that letter?

ESTHER. Oh, I like him very much. [*Coquettishly.*

GEORGE. Ah! [*Sighing.*

ESTHER. And I'm very fond of this letter.

GEORGE. Then, Esther, you don't care for me.

ESTHER. Don't I! How do you know?

GEORGE. Because you won't let me read that letter.

ESTHER. It won't please you if you see it.

GEORGE. I dare say not. That's just the reason that I want to. You won't?

ESTHER [*hesitates*]. I will. There! [*Giving it to him.*

GEORGE [*reads*]. "Dear Madam——"

ESTHER. That's tender, isn't it?

GEORGE. "—the terms are four pounds—your dresses to be found. For eight weeks certain, and longer if you should suit. [*In astonishment*] I cannot close the engagement until the return of my partner. I expect him back to-day, and will write you as soon as I have seen him—Yours very," *et cetera.* Four pounds—find dresses. What does this mean?

ESTHER. It means that they want a Columbine for the pantomime at Manchester, and I think I shall get the engagement.

GEORGE. Manchester; then you'll leave London!

ESTHER. I must. [*Pathetically*] You see this little house is on my

shoulders. Polly only earns eighteen shillings a week, and Father has been out of work a long, long time. I make the bread here, and it's hard to make sometimes. I've been mistress of this place, and forced to think ever since my mother died, and I was eight years old. Four pounds a week is a large sum, and I can save out of it.

[*This speech is not to be spoken in a tone implying hardship.*

GEORGE. But you'll go away, and I shan't see you.

ESTHER. P'raps it will be for the best. What future is there for us? You're a man of rank, and I am a poor girl who gets her living by dancing. It would have been better that we had never met.

GEORGE. No.

ESTHER. Yes, it would, for I'm afraid that——

GEORGE. You love me?

ESTHER. I don't know. I'm not sure; but I think I do.

[*Turns half-face to* GEORGE.

GEORGE [*trying to seize her hand*]. Esther!

ESTHER. No. Think of the difference of our stations.

GEORGE. That's what Hawtree says. Caste! caste! Curse caste!

ESTHER. If I go to Manchester it will be for the best. We must both try to forget each other.

GEORGE. Forget you! no, Esther; let me—— [*Seizing her hand.*

POLLY [*without*]. Mind what you're about. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

[GEORGE *and* ESTHER *sit in window-seat.*

[*Enter* POLLY *and* HAWTREE.

POLLY. You nasty, great, clumsy corporal, you've spilt the water all over my frock. Oh, dear! [HAWTREE *puts kettle on ham on table.*] Take it off the ham! [HAWTREE *then places it on the mantelpiece.*

POLLY. No, no; put it in the fireplace. [HAWTREE *does so.*] You've spoilt my frock.

HAWTREE. Allow me to offer you a new one.

POLLY. No, I won't. You'll be calling to see how it looks when it's on. Haven't you got a handkerchief?

HAWTREE. Yes!

POLLY. Then wipe it dry.

[HAWTREE *bends almost on one knee, and wipes dress. Enter* SAM, *whistling. Throws cap into* HAWTREE's *hat on bureau.*

SAM [*sulkily*]. 'Arternoon—yer didn't hear me knock!—the door was open. I'm afraid I intrude.

POLLY. No, you don't. We're glad to see you if you've got a handkerchief. Help to wipe this dry.

[SAM *pulls out handkerchief from slop, and dropping on one knee snatches skirt of dress from* HAWTREE, *who looks up surprised.*

HAWTREE. I'm very sorry. [*Rising*] I beg your pardon.

[SAM *stares* HAWTREE *out.*

POLLY. It won't spoil it.

SAM. The stain won't come out. [*Rising.*

POLLY. It's only water!

SAM [*to* ESTHER]. 'Arternoon, Miss Eccles! [*To* GEORGE. POLLY *rises.*] 'Arternoon, sir! Who's the other swell? [*To* POLLY.

POLLY. I'll introduce you. Captain Hawtree—Mr Samuel Gerridge.

HAWTREE. Charmed, I'm sure. [*Staring at* SAM *through eyeglass.* SAM *acknowledges* HAWTREE'S *recognition by a 'chuck' of the head over left shoulder; going up to* GEORGE] Who's this?

GEORGE. Polly's sweetheart.

HAWTREE. Oh! Now if I can be of no further assistance, I'll go. [*Comes over to bureau.*

POLLY. Going, Corporal?

HAWTREE. Yaas! [*Taking up hat and stick from bureau, he sees* SAM'S *cap. He picks it out carefully, and examines it as a curiosity, drops it on the floor and pushes it away with his stick, at the same time moving backwards, causing him to bump against* SAM, *who turns round savagely.*] I beg your pardon! George, will you—— [GEORGE *takes no notice.*] Will you——

GEORGE. What?

HAWTREE. Go with me?

GEORGE. Go? No!

HAWTREE [*coming to* POLLY]. Then, Miss Eccles—I mean, my lady. [*Shaking hands and going; as he backs away bumps against* SAM. HAWTREE *close to door, keeping his eye on* SAM, *who has shown signs of anger.*

POLLY. Good-bye, Corporal!

HAWTREE [*at door*]. Good-bye! Good afternoon, Mr—Mr—er—— Pardon me.

SAM [*with constrained rage*]. Gerridge, sir. Gerridge!

HAWTREE [*as if remembering name*]. Ah! Gerridge. Good day. [*Exit.*

SAM [*turning to* POLLY *in awful rage*]. Who's that fool? Who's that long idiot?

POLLY. I told you; Captain Hawtree.

SAM. What's 'e want 'ere?

POLLY. He's a friend of Mr D'Alroy's.

SAM. Ugh! Isn't one of 'em enough?

POLLY. What do you mean?

SAM. For the neighbours to talk about. Who's he after?

POLLY. What do you mean by 'after'? You're forgetting yourself, I think.

SAM. No, I'm not forgetting myself—I'm remembering you. What can a long fool of a swell dressed up to the nines within an inch of his

life want with two girls of your class? Look at the difference of your stations! 'E don't come 'ere after any good.

[*During the speech* ESTHER *crosses to fire and sits before it in a low chair.* GEORGE *follows her, and sits on her left.*

POLLY. Samuel!

SAM. I mean what I say. People should stick to their own class. Life's a railway journey, and Mankind's a passenger—first class, second class, third class. Any person found riding in a superior class to that for which he has taken his ticket will be removed at the first station stopped at, according to the by-laws of the company.

POLLY. You're giving yourself nice airs! What business is it of yours who comes here? Who are you?

SAM. I'm a mechanic.

POLLY. That's evident.

SAM. I ain't ashamed of it. I'm not ashamed of my paper cap.

POLLY. Why should you be? I dare say Captain Hawtree isn't ashamed of his fourteen-and-sixpenny gossamer.

SAM. You think a deal of him 'cos he's a captain. Why did he call you 'my lady'?

POLLY. Because he treated me as one. I wish you'd make the same mistake!

SAM. Ugh!

[SAM *goes angrily to bureau,* POLLY *bounces up stage, and sits in window-seat.*

ESTHER [*sitting with* GEORGE, *tête-à-tête, by fire*]. But we must listen to reason.

GEORGE. I hate reason!

ESTHER. I wonder what it means?

GEORGE. Everything disagreeable! When people talk unpleasantly they always say listen to reason.

SAM [*turning round*]. What will the neighbours say?

POLLY. I don't care!

SAM. What will the neighbours *think*?

POLLY. They can't think. They're like you, they've not been educated up to it.

SAM. It all comes of your being on the stage. [*Going to* POLLY.

POLLY. It all comes of your not understanding the stage or anything else—but putty. Now, if you were a gentleman——

SAM. Why, then, of course, I should make up to a lady!

POLLY. Ugh! [POLLY *flings herself into chair.*

GEORGE. Reason's an idiot! Two and two are four, and twelve are fifteen, and eight are twenty. That's reason!

SAM [*turning to* POLLY]. Painting your cheeks!

POLLY [*rising*]. Better paint our *cheeks* than paint *nasty old doors*

as you do. How can you understand art? You're only a mechanic! You're not a professional. You're in trade. You are not of the same station that we are. When the manager speaks to you you touch your hat and say, "Yes, sir," because he's your superior.

[*Snaps fingers under* SAM's *nose.*

GEORGE. When people love there's no such thing as money—it don't exist.

ESTHER. Yes, it does.

GEORGE. Then it oughtn't to.

SAM. The manager employs me same as he does you. Payment is good everywhere and anywhere. Whatever's commercial is right.

POLLY. Actors are not like mechanics. They wear cloth coats, and not fustian jackets.

SAM. I despise play-actors. [*Sneeringly in* POLLY's *face.*

POLLY. And I despise mechanics. [POLLY *slaps his face.*

GEORGE. I never think of anything else but you.

ESTHER. Really?

SAM [*goes to bureau, misses cap, looks around, sees it on the floor, picks it up angrily, and comes to* POLLY]. I won't stay here to be insulted.

[*Putting on cap.*

POLLY. Nobody wants you to stay. Go! Go! Go!

SAM. I will go. Good-bye, Miss Mary Eccles. [*Goes off and returns quickly.*] I shan't come here again! [*At door half open.*

POLLY. Don't! Good riddance to bad rubbish.

SAM [*rushing to* POLLY]. You can go to your *captain*!

POLLY. And you to your *putty*.

[*Throws his cap down and kicks it—then goes and picks it up.* POLLY *turns and rises, leaning against table, facing him, crosses to door, and locks it.* SAM, *hearing the click of the lock, turns quickly.*

ESTHER. And shall you always love me as you do now?

GEORGE. More.

POLLY. Now you *shan't* go. [*Locking door, taking out key, which she pockets, and placing her back against door*] Nyer! Now I'll just show you my power. Nyer!

SAM. *Miss Mary* Eccles, let me out! [*Advancing to door.*

POLLY. *Mr* Samuel Gerridge, I shan't [SAM *turns away.*

ESTHER. Now, you two. [*Postman's knock.*] The postman!

SAM. Now you must let me out. You must unlock the door.

POLLY. No, I needn't. [*Opens window, looking out*] Here—postman. [*Takes letter from postman, at window.*] Thank you. [*Flicks* SAM *in the face with letter.*] For you, Esther!

ESTHER [*rising*]. For me?

POLLY. Yes.

[*Gives it to her, and closes window, and returns to door triumphantly.* SAM *goes to window.*

ESTHER. From Manchester!

GEORGE. Manchester!

ESTHER [*reading*]. I've got the engagement—four pounds a week.

GEORGE [*placing his arm around her*]. You shan't go. Esther—stay—be my wife!

ESTHER. But the world—your world?

GEORGE. Hang the world! You're my world. Stay with your husband, *Mrs George D'Alroy.*

[*During this* POLLY *has been dancing up and down in front of door.*

SAM. I *will* go out! [*Turning with sudden determination.*

POLLY. You can't, and you shan't!

SAM. I can—I will! [*Opens window and jumps out.*

POLLY [*frightened*]. He's hurt himself. Sam—Sam, dear Sam!

[*Running to window.* SAM *appears at window.* POLLY *slaps his face and shuts window down violently.*

POLLY. Nyer! [*During this* GEORGE *has kissed* ESTHER.

GEORGE. *My wife!*

[*The handle of the door is heard to rattle, then the door is shaken violently.* ESTHER *crosses to door; finding it locked turns to* POLLY, *sitting in window-seat, who gives her the key.* ESTHER *then opens the door.* ECCLES *reels in, very drunk, and clings to the corner of bureau for support.* GEORGE *stands, pulling his moustache.* ESTHER, *a little way up, looking with shame, first at her father, then at* GEORGE. POLLY *sitting in window recess.*

## ACT II

SCENE: D'ALROY'S *rooms in Mayfair. Two windows with muslin curtains on right. A door (right) and also folding doors (left) at back. Piano on left with sofa beyond, and next to sofa a mahogany easel with oil-painting of* D'ALROY *in full Dragoon regimentals.*

*Loo-table, on which are a jug of claret, two wine-glasses, box of cigarettes, vase of flowers, and a basket of coloured wools.*

*Easy-chairs left and right of table; foot-stool; armchair near windows.*

*Moonlight is coming into the room.*

ESTHER *and* GEORGE *discovered.* ESTHER *at window; when curtain has risen she comes down slowly to chair right of table, and* GEORGE *sitting in easy-chair left of table.* GEORGE *has his uniform trousers and spurs on.*

ESTHER. George dear, you seem out of spirits.

GEORGE [*smoking cigarette*]. Not at all, dear, not at all. [*Rallying.*

ESTHER. Then why don't you talk?

GEORGE. I've nothing to say.

ESTHER. That's no reason.

GEORGE. I can't talk about nothing.

ESTHER. Yes, you can; you often do. [*Crossing to round back of table and caressing him*] You used to do before we were married.

GEORGE. No, I didn't. I talked about you, and my love for you. D'ye call that nothing?

ESTHER [*sitting on stool, left of* GEORGE]. How long have we been married, dear? Let me see; six months yesterday. [*Dreamily*] It hardly seems a week; it almost seems a dream.

GEORGE [*putting his arm around her*]. Awfully jolly dream. Don't let us wake up. [*Aside and recovering himself*] How ever shall I tell her?

ESTHER. And when I married you I was twenty-two; wasn't I?

GEORGE. Yes, dear; but then, you know, you must have been some age or other.

ESTHER. No; but to think that I lived two-and-twenty years without knowing you!

GEORGE. What of it, dear?

ESTHER. It seems such a dreadful waste of time.

GEORGE. So it was—awful!

ESTHER. Do you remember our first meeting? Then I was in the ballet.

GEORGE. Yes; now you're in the heavies.

ESTHER. Then I was in the front rank—now I am of high rank—the Honourable Mrs George D'Alroy. You promoted me to be your wife.

GEORGE. No, dear, you promoted me to be your husband.

ESTHER. And now I'm one of the aristocracy; ain't I?

GEORGE. Yes, dear; I suppose that we may consider ourselves——

ESTHER. Tell me, George; are you quite sure that you are proud of your poor little humble wife?

GEORGE. Proud of you! Proud as the winner of the Derby.

ESTHER. Wouldn't you have loved me better if I'd been a lady?

GEORGE. You *are* a lady—you're my wife.

ESTHER. What will your mamma say when she knows of our marriage? I quite tremble at the thought of meeting her.

GEORGE. So do I. Luckily, she's in Rome.

ESTHER. Do you know, George, I should like to be married all over again.

GEORGE. Not to anybody else, I hope.

ESTHER. My darling!

GEORGE. But why over again? Why?

ESTHER. Our courtship was so beautiful. It was like in a novel from the library, only better. You, a fine, rich, high-born gentleman, coming to our humble little house to court poor me. Do you remember the ballet you first saw me in? That was at Covent Garden. *Jeanne la Folle; or, The Return of the Soldier.* [*Goes to piano.*] Don't you remember the dance? [*Plays a quick movement.*

GEORGE. Esther, how came you to learn to play the piano? Did you teach yourself?

ESTHER. Yes. [*Turning on music-stool*] So did Polly. We can only just touch the notes to amuse ourselves.

GEORGE. How was it?

ESTHER. I've told you so often.

[*Rises and sits on stool at* GEORGE's *feet.*

GEORGE. Tell me again. I'm like the children—I like to hear what I know already.

ESTHER. Well, then, Mother died when I was quite young. I can only just remember her. Polly was an infant; so I had to be Polly's mother. Father—who is a very eccentric man [GEORGE *sighs deeply*—ESTHER *notices it and goes on rapidly*], but a very good one when you know him—did not take much notice of us, and we got on as we could. We used to let the first floor, and a lodger took it—Herr Griffenhaagen. He was a ballet-master at the Opera. He took a fancy to me, and asked me if I should like to learn to dance, and I told him Father couldn't afford to pay for my tuition; and he said that [*imitation*] he did not vant bayment, but dat he would teach me for noding, for he had taken a fancy to me, because I was like a leetle lady he had known long years

ago in de far-off land he came from. Then he got us an engagement at the theatre. That was how we first were in the ballet.

GEORGE [*slapping his leg*]. That fellow was a great brick; I should like to ask him to dinner. What became of him?

ESTHER. I don't know. He left England. [GEORGE *fidgets and looks at watch.*] You are very restless, George. What's the matter?

GEORGE. Nothing.

ESTHER. Are you going out?

GEORGE. Yes. [*Looking at his boots and spurs*] That's the reason I dined in——

ESTHER. To the barracks?

GEORGE. Yes.

ESTHER. On duty?

GEORGE [*hesitatingly*]. On duty. [*Rising*] And, of course, when a man is a soldier he must go on duty when he's ordered, and where he's ordered, and—and—[*aside*]—why did I ever enter the service!

ESTHER [*rises—crosses to* GEORGE—*and twining her arm round him*]. George, if you must go out to your club, go; don't mind leaving me. Somehow or other, George, these last few days everything seems to have changed with me—I don't know why. Sometimes my eyes fill with tears for no reason, and sometimes I feel so happy for no reason. I don't mind being left by myself as I used to do. When you are a few minutes behind time I don't run to the window and watch for you, and turn irritable. Not that I love you less—no, for I love you more; but often when you are away I don't feel that I am by myself. [*Dropping her head on his breast*] I never feel alone. [*Goes to piano and turns over music.*

GEORGE [*watching* ESTHER]. What angels women are! At least, this one is. I forget all about the others. [*Carriage-wheels heard off.*] If I'd known I could have been so happy I'd have sold out when I married.

[*Knock at street door.*

ESTHER [*standing at table*]. That for us, dear?

GEORGE [*at first window*]. Hawtree in a hansom. He's come for—[*aside*]—me. I *must* tell her sooner or later. [*At door*] Come in, Hawtree.

[*Enter* HAWTREE, *in regimentals, right door.*

HAWTREE. How do? Hope you're well, Mrs D'Alroy? George, are you coming to——

GEORGE. No, I've dined [*gives a significant look*]—we dined early.

[ESTHER *plays scraps of music at piano.*

HAWTREE [*sotto voce*]. Haven't you told her?

GEORGE. No, I daren't.

HAWTREE. But you must.

GEORGE. You know what an awful coward I am. You do it for me.

HAWTREE. Not for worlds. I've just had my own *adieux* to make.

GEORGE. Ah, yes—to Florence Carberry. How did she take it?

HAWTREE. Oh, [*slight pause*] very well.

GEORGE. Did she cry? [*Earnestly.*

HAWTREE. No

GEORGE. Nor exhibit any emotion whatever?

HAWTREE. No, not particularly.

GEORGE. Didn't you kiss her? [*Surprisedly.*

HAWTREE. No; Lady Clardonax was in the room.

GEORGE. Didn't she squeeze your hand? [*Wonderingly.*

HAWTREE. No.

GEORGE. Didn't she say anything? [*Impressively.*

HAWTREE. No, except that she hoped to see me back again soon, and that India was a bad climate.

GEORGE. Umph! It seems to have been a tragic parting [*serio-comically*]—almost as tragic as parting—your back hair.

HAWTREE. Lady Florence is not the sort of person to make a scene.

GEORGE. To be sure, she's not your wife. I wish Esther would be as cool and comfortable. [*After a pause*] No, I don't—no, I don't.

[*A rap at door.*

[*Enter* DIXON, *right door.*

GEORGE [*goes up to* DIXON]. Oh, Dixon, lay out my——

DIXON. I have laid them out, sir; everything is ready.

GEORGE [*coming down to* HAWTREE—*after a pause, irresolutely*]. I must tell her—mustn't I?

HAWTREE. Better send for her sister. Let Dixon go for her in a cab.

GEORGE. Just so. I'll send him at once. Dixon!

[*Goes up and talks to* DIXON.

ESTHER [*rising*]. Do you want to have a talk with my husband? Shall I go into the dining-room?

HAWTREE. No, Mrs D'Alroy.

[*Going to right of table and placing cap on it.*

GEORGE. No, dear. At once, Dixon. Tell the cabman to drive like —[*exit* DIXON]—like a—cornet just joined.

ESTHER [*to* HAWTREE]. Are you going to take him anywhere?

HAWTREE [GEORGE *comes to* HAWTREE *and touches him quickly on the shoulder before he can speak*]. No. [*Aside*] Yes—to India. [*To* GEORGE] Tell her now.

GEORGE. No, no. I'll wait till I put on my uniform.

[*The right door opens, and* POLLY *peeps in.*

POLLY. How d'ye do, good people—quite well?

[POLLY *enters—kisses* ESTHER.

GEORGE. Eh? Didn't you meet Dixon?

POLLY. Who?

GEORGE. Dixon—my man.

POLLY. No.

GEORGE. Confound it! He'll have his ride for nothing. How d'ye do, Polly? [*Shakes hands.*

POLLY. How d'ye do, George?

[ESTHER *takes* POLLY'S *things.* POLLY *places parasol on table.*

POLLY. Bless you, my turtles. [*Blessing them, ballet fashion*] George, kiss your mother. [*He kisses her.*] That's what I call an honourable brother-in-law's kiss. I'm not in the way, am I?

GEORGE [*behind easy-chair right of table*]. Not at all. I'm very glad you've come.

[ESTHER *shows* POLLY *the new music.* POLLY *sits at piano and plays comic tune.*

HAWTREE [*aside to* GEORGE]. Under ordinary circumstances she's not a very eligible visitor.

GEORGE. Caste again. [*Going up right*] I'll be back directly.

[*Exit* GEORGE.

HAWTREE [*looking at watch*]. Mrs D'Alroy, I——

ESTHER [*who is standing over* POLLY *at piano*]. Going?

POLLY [*rising*]. Do I drive you away, Captain?

[*Taking her parasol from table.*

HAWTREE. No.

POLLY. Yes, I do. I frighten you, I'm so ugly. I know I do. You frighten me.

HAWTREE. How so?

POLLY. You're so handsome. Particularly in those clothes, for all the world like an inspector of police.

ESTHER [*half aside*]. Polly!

POLLY. I will! I like to take him down a bit.

HAWTREE [*aside*]. This is rather a wild sort of thing in sisters-in-law

POLLY. Any news, Captain?

HAWTREE [*in a drawling tone*]. No. Is there any news with you?

POLLY. Yaas; [*imitating him*] we've got a new piece coming out at our theatre.

HAWTREE [*interested*]. What's it about?

POLLY [*drawling*]. I don't know. [*To* Esther] Had him there! [HAWTREE *drops his sword from his arm;* POLLY *turns round quickly, hearing the noise, and pretends to be frightened.*] Going to kill anybody to-day, that you've got your sword on?

HAWTREE. No.

POLLY. I thought not.

[*Sings.*] "With a sabre on his brow,
And a helmet by his side,
The soldier sweethearts servant-maids,
And eats cold meat besides."

[*Laughs and walks about waving her parasol.*

[*Enter* GEORGE *in uniform, carrying in his hand his sword, sword-belt, and cap.* ESTHER *takes them from him, and places them on sofa.*

POLLY [*clapping her hands*]. Oh! here's a beautiful brother-in-law. Why didn't you come in on horseback, as they do at Astley's?—gallop in and say [*imitating soldier on horseback, and prancing up and down stage during the piece*], "Soldiers of France! the eyes of Europe are a-looking at you! The Empire has confidence in you, and France expects that every man this day will do his—little utmost! The foe is before you—more's the pity—and you are before them—worse luck for you! Forward! Go and get killed; and to those who escape the Emperor will give a little bit of ribbon! Nineteens, about! Forward! Gallop! Charge!"

[*Galloping to right, imitating bugle, and giving point with parasol. She nearly spears* HAWTREE'S *nose.* HAWTREE *claps his hand upon his sword-hilt. She throws herself into chair, laughing, and clapping* HAWTREE'S *cap (from table) upon her head. All laugh and applaud. Carriage-wheels heard without.*

POLLY. Oh, what a funny little cap! It's got no peak. [*A peal of knocks heard at street-door.*] What's that?

GEORGE [*who has hastened to window*]. A carriage. Good heavens—my mother!

HAWTREE. The Marchioness!

ESTHER [*crossing to* GEORGE]. Oh, George!

POLLY [*crossing to window*]. A Marchioness! A real, live Marchioness! Let me look! I never saw a real, live Marchioness in all my life.

GEORGE [*forcing her from window*]. No, no, no. She doesn't know I'm married. I must break it to her by degrees. What shall I do?

[*By this time* HAWTREE *is at door right,* ESTHER *at door left.*

ESTHER. Let me go into the bedroom until——

HAWTREE. Too late! She's on the stairs.

ESTHER. Here, then! [*At centre doors, opens them.*

POLLY. I want to see a real, live March——

[GEORGE *lifts her in his arms and places her within folding-doors with* ESTHER—*then, shutting doors quickly, turns and faces* HAWTREE, *who, gathering up his sword, faces* GEORGE. *They then exchange places much in the fashion of soldiers 'mounting guard.'* GEORGE *opens door and admits* MARCHIONESS.

GEORGE [*with great ceremony*]. My dear mother, I saw you getting out of the carriage.

MARCHIONESS. My dear boy [*kissing his forehead*], I'm so glad I got

to London before you embarked. [GEORGE *nervous.*] Captain Hawtree, I think. How do you do?

HAWTREE [*coming forward a little*]. Quite well, I thank your ladyship. I trust you are——

MARCHIONESS [*sitting in easy-chair*] Oh, quite, thanks. [*Slight pause.*] Do you still see the Countess and Lady Florence?

[*Looking at him through her glasses.*

HAWTREE. Yes.

MARCHIONESS. Please remember me to them—— [HAWTREE *takes cap from table, and places sword under his arm.*] Are you going?

HAWTREE. Ya-a-s. Compelled. [*Bows, crossing round back of table. To* GEORGE] I'll be at the door for you at seven. We must be at barracks by the quarter. Poor devil! This comes of a man marrying beneath him! [*Exit* HAWTREE.

MARCHIONESS. I'm not sorry that he's gone, for I wanted to talk to you alone. Strange that a woman of such good birth as the Countess should encourage the attentions of Captain Hawtree for her daughter Florence. [*During these lines* D'ALROY *conceals* POLLY'S *hat and umbrella under table.*] Lady Clardonax was one of the old Carberrys of Hampshire—not the Norfolk Carberrys, but the direct line. And Mr Hawtree's grandfather was in trade—something in the City—soap, I think—— Stool, George! [*Points to stool.* GEORGE *brings it to her. She motions that he is to sit at her feet;* GEORGE *does so with a sigh.*] He's a very nice person, but *parvenu*, as one may see by his languor and his swagger. My boy [*kissing his forehead*], I am sure, will never make a *mésalliance*. He is a D'Alroy, and by his mother's side *Plantagenista*. The source of our life stream is royal.

GEORGE. How is the Marquis?

MARCHIONESS. Paralysed. I left him at Spa with three physicians. He always is paralysed at this time of the year; it is in the family. The paralysis is not personal, but hereditary. I came over to see my steward; got to town last night.

GEORGE. How did you find me out here?

MARCHIONESS. I sent the footman to the barracks, and he saw your man Dixon in the street, and Dixon gave him this address. It's so long since I've seen you. [*Leans back in chair.*] You're looking very well, and I dare say when mounted are quite a *beau cavalier*. And so, my boy [*playing with his hair*], you are going abroad for the first time on active service.

GEORGE [*aside*]. Every word can be heard in the next room. If they'd only gone upstairs.

MARCHIONESS. And now, my dear boy, before you go I want to give you some advice; and you mustn't despise it because I'm an old woman. We old women know a great deal more than people give us credit for.

You are a soldier—so was your father—so was his father—so was mine—so was our royal founder; we were born to lead! The common people expect it from us. It is our duty. Do you not remember in the *Chronicles* of Froissart? [*With great enjoyment*] I think I can quote it word for word; I've a wonderful memory for my age. [*With closed eyes*] It was in the fifty-ninth chapter—"How Godefroy D'Alroy helde the towne of St Amande durying the siege before Tournay. It said the towne was not closed but with pales, and captayne there was Sir Amory of Pauy—the Seneschall of Carcassoune—who had said it was not able to hold agaynste an hooste, when one Godefroy D'Alroy sayd that rather than he woulde depart, he woulde keep it to the best of his power. Whereat the souldiers cheered and sayd, 'Lead us on, Sir Godefroy.' And then began a fierce assault; and they within were chased, and sought for shelter from street to street. But Godefroy stood at the gate so valyantly that the souldiers helde the towne until the commyng of the Earl of Haynault with twelve thousande men."

GEORGE [*aside*]. I wish she'd go. If she once gets on to Froissart she'll never know when to stop.

MARCHIONESS. When my boy fights—and you will fight—he is sure to distinguish himself. It is his nature to—[*toys with his hair*]—he cannot forget his birth. And when you meet these Asiatic ruffians, who have dared to revolt, and to outrage humanity, you will strike as your ancestor Sir Galtier of Chevrault struck at Poictiers. [*Changing tone of voice, as if remembering*] Froissart mentions it thus—"Sir Galtier, with his four squires, was in the front of that battell, and there did marvel in arms. And Sir Galtier rode up to the Prince, and sayd to him—'Sir, take your horse and ryde forth, this journey is yours. God is this day in your hands. Gette us to the French Kynge's batayle. I think verily by his valyantesse he woll not fly. Advance banner in the name of God and of Saynt George!' And Sir Galtier galloped forward to see his Kynge's victory, and meet his own death."

GEORGE [*aside*]. If Esther hears all this!

MARCHIONESS. There is another subject about which I should have spoken to you before this; but an absurd prudery forbade me. I may never see you more. I am old—and you—are going into battle—[*kissing his forehead with emotion*]—and this may be our last meeting. [*A noise heard within folding-doors.*] What's that?

GEORGE. Nothing—my man Dixon in there.

MARCHIONESS. We may not meet again on this earth. I do not fear your conduct, my George, with men; but I know the temptations that beset a youth who is well born. But a true soldier, a true gentleman, should not only be without fear, but without reproach. It is easier to fight a furious man than to forego the conquest of a love-sick girl. A thousand Sepoys slain in battle cannot redeem the honour of a man who

has betrayed the confidence of a trusting woman. Think, George, what dishonour—what stain upon your manhood—to hurl a girl to shame and degradation! And what excuse for it? That she is plebeian? A man of real honour will spare the woman who has confessed her love for him, as he would give quarter to an enemy he had disarmed. [*Taking his hands*] Let my boy avoid the snares so artfully spread; and when he asks his mother to welcome the woman he has chosen for his wife, let me take her to my arms and plant a motherly kiss upon the white brow of a lady. [*Noise of a fall heard within folding-doors; rising*] What's that?

GEORGE. Nothing. [*Rising.*

MARCHIONESS. I heard a cry.

[*Folding-doors open, discovering* ESTHER *with* POLLY, *staggering in, fainting.*

POLLY. George! George!

[GEORGE *goes up, and* ESTHER *falls in his arms.* GEORGE *places* ESTHER *on sofa.*

MARCHIONESS [*coming down right*]. Who are these *women*?

POLLY. Women!

MARCHIONESS. George D'Alroy, these persons should have been sent away. How could you dare to risk your mother meeting women of their stamp?

POLLY [*violently*]. What does she mean? How dare she call me a woman! What's she, I'd like to know?

GEORGE. Silence, Polly! You mustn't insult my mother.

MARCHIONESS. The insult is from you. I leave you, and I hope that time may induce me to forget this scene of degradation

[*Turning to go.*

GEORGE. Stay, Mother. [MARCHIONESS *turns slightly away.*] Before you go [GEORGE *has raised* ESTHER *from sofa in both arms*] let me present to you Mrs George D'Alroy. *My wife!*

MARCHIONESS. Married!

GEORGE. Married.

[*The* MARCHIONESS *sinks into easy-chair.* GEORGE *replaces* ESTHER *on sofa, but still retains her hand. Three hesitating taps at door heard.* GEORGE *crosses to door, opens it, discovers* ECCLES, *who enters.*

ECCLES. They told us to come up. When your man came Polly was out; so I thought I should do instead. [*Calling at door*] Come up, Sam.

[*Enter* SAM *in his Sunday clothes, with short cane and smoking a cheroot. He nods and grins*—POLLY *points to* MARCHIONESS—SAM *takes cheroot from his mouth and quickly removes his hat.*

ECCLES. Sam had just called; so we three—Sam and I, and your man, all came in the 'ansom-cab together. Didn't we, Sam?

MARCHIONESS [*with glasses up, to* GEORGE]. Who is this?

GEORGE. My wife's father.

MARCHIONESS. What is he?

GEORGE. A—nothing.

ECCLES. I am one of Nature's noblemen. Happy to see you, my lady—[*turning to her*]—now, my daughters have told me who you are—[GEORGE *turns his back in an agony as* ECCLES *crosses to* MARCHIONESS]—we old folks, fathers and mothers of the young couples, ought to make friends. [*Holding out his dirty hand.*

MARCHIONESS [*shrinking back*]. Go away! [ECCLES *goes back to table again, disgusted.*] What's his name?

GEORGE. Eccles.

MARCHIONESS. Eccles! Eccles! There never was an Eccles. He don't exist.

ECCLES. Don't he, though! What d'ye call this?

[*He is just going to take a decanter when* SAM *stops him.*

MARCHIONESS. No Eccles was ever born!

GEORGE. He takes the liberty of breathing notwithstanding. [*Aside*] And I wish he wouldn't!

MARCHIONESS. And who is the little man? Is he also Eccles?

[SAM *looks round.* POLLY *gets close up to him, and looks with defiant glance at the* MARCHIONESS.

GEORGE. No.

MARCHIONESS. Thank goodness! What then?

GEORGE. His name is Gerridge.

MARCHIONESS. *Gerridge!* It breaks one's teeth. Why is he here?

GEORGE. He is making love to Polly, my wife's sister.

MARCHIONESS. And what is he?

GEORGE. A gasman.

MARCHIONESS. He looks it. [GEORGE *goes up to* ESTHER.] And what is she—the—the—the sister?

[ECCLES *who has been casting longing eyes at the decanter on table, edges towards it, and, when he thinks no one is noticing, fills wine-glass.*

POLLY [*asserting herself indignantly*]. I'm in the ballet at the Theatre Royal, Lambeth. So was Esther. We're not ashamed of what we are! We have no cause to be.

SAM. That's right, Polly! Pitch into them swells!—who are they?

[ECCLES *by this time has seized wine-glass, and, turning his back, is about to drink, when* HAWTREE *enters door.* ECCLES *hides glass under his coat, and pretends to be looking up at picture.*

HAWTREE [*entering*]. George! [*Stops suddenly, looking round.*] So all's known!

MARCHIONESS [*rising*]. Captain Hawtree, see me to my carriage; I am broken-hearted! [*Takes* HAWTREE's *arm.*

ECCLES [*who has tasted the claret, spits it out with a grimace, exclaiming*]. Rot!

[POLLY *goes to the piano, sits on stool*—SAM *back to audience, leaning on piano*—ECCLES *exits through folding-doors.*

GEORGE [*to* MARCHIONESS]. Don't go in anger. You may not see me again.

[ESTHER *rises in nervous excitement, clutching* GEORGE's *hand.* MARCHIONESS *stops.*

ESTHER [*with arm round his neck*]. Oh, George! must you go?

GEORGE. Yes.

ESTHER. I can't leave you! I'll go with you!

GEORGE. Impossible! The country is too unsettled.

ESTHER. May I come after you?

GEORGE. Yes.

ESTHER [*with her head on his shoulder*]. I may.

MARCHIONESS. It is his duty to go. His honour calls him. The honour of his family—*our* honour!

ESTHER. But I love him so! Pray don't be angry with me!

HAWTREE [*looking at watch*]. George!

GEORGE. I must go, love!

MARCHIONESS [*advancing*]. Let me arm you, George—let your mother, as in the days of old. There is blood—and blood, my son. See, your wife cries when she should be proud of you!

GEORGE. My Esther is all that is good and noble. No lady born to a coronet could be gentler or more true. Esther, my wife, fetch me my sword, and buckle my belt around me.

ESTHER [*clinging to him*]. No, no; I can't!

GEORGE. Try. [*Whispers to* ESTHER] To please my mother. [*To* MARCHIONESS] You shall see. [ESTHER *totters up stage,* POLLY *assisting her, and brings down his sword. As* ESTHER *is trying to buckle his belt he whispers*] I've left money for you, my darling. My lawyer will call on you to-morrow. Forgive me! I tried hard to tell you we were ordered for India; but when the time came my heart failed me, and I——

[ESTHER, *before she can succeed in fastening his sword-belt, reels, and falls fainting in his arms.* POLLY *hurries to her.*

# ACT III

SCENE: *The room in Stangate (as in Act I). Same furniture as in Act I with exception of piano, with roll of music tied up on it in place of bureau by door on right. Map of India over mantelpiece. Sword with crape knot, spurs, and cap, craped, hanging over chimney-piece. Portrait of* D'ALROY (*large*) *on mantelpiece, Berceaunette, and child, with coral, in it.* POLLY'S *bonnet and shawl hanging on peg. Small tin saucepan in fender, fire alight, and kettle on it. Two candles (tallow) in sticks, one of which is broken about three inches from the top and hangs over. Slate and pencil on table. Jug on table, bandbox and ballet skirt on table.*

*At rise of curtain* POLLY *discovered at table, back of stage. Comes down and places the skirt in bandbox. She is dressed in black.*

POLLY [*placing skirt in box, and leaning her chin upon her hand*]. There—there's the dress for poor Esther in case she gets the engagement, which I don't suppose she will. It's too good luck, and good luck never comes to her, poor thing. [*Goes to cradle.*] Baby's asleep still. How good he looks—as good as if he were dead, like his poor father; and alive too, at the same time, like his dear self. Ah! dear me; it's a strange world. [*Sits in chair right of table, feeling in pocket for money.*] Four and elevenpence. That must do for to-day and to-morrow. Esther is going to bring in the rusks for Georgey. [*Takes up slate.*] Three, five—eight, and four—twelve, one shilling—Father can only have twopence. [*This is all to be said in one breath.*] He must make do with that till Saturday, when I get my salary. If Esther gets the engagement I shan't have many more salaries to take; I shall leave the stage and retire into private life. I wonder if I shall like private life, and if private life will like me. It will seem so strange being no longer Miss Mary Eccles—but Mrs Samuel Gerridge. [*Writes it on slate.*] "Mrs Samuel Gerridge." [*Laughs bashfully.*] La! to think of my being Mrs Anybody. How annoyed Susan Smith will be! [*Writing on slate*] "Mrs Samuel Gerridge presents her compliments to Miss Susan Smith, and Mrs Samuel Gerridge requests the favour of Miss Susan Smith's company to tea, on Tuesday evening next, at Mrs Samuel Gerridge's house." [*Pause.*] Poor Susan! [*Beginning again*] "*P.S.*—Mrs Samuel Gerridge——" [*Knock heard at room door*; POLLY *starts.*

SAM [*without*]. Polly, open the door.

POLLY. Sam! Come in.

SAM [*without*]. I can't.

POLLY. Why not?

SAM. I've got somethin' on my 'ead.

[POLLY *rises and opens door.* SAM *enters, carrying two rolls of wall-paper, one in each hand, and a small table on his head, which he deposits down stage, then puts rolls of paper on piano, as also his cap.* SAM *has a rule-pocket in corduroys.*

POLLY [*shuts door*]. What's that?

SAM [*pointing to table with pride*]. Furniture. How are you, my Polly? [*Kissing her*] You look handsomer than ever this morning. [*Dances and sings.*] "Tid-dle-di-tum-ti-di-do."

POLLY. What's the matter, Sam?—are you mad?

SAM. No, 'appy—much the same thing.

POLLY. Where have you been to these two days?

SAM [*all excitement*]. That's just what I'm goin' to tell yer. Polly, my pet, my brightest bat's-wing and most brilliant burner, what do yer think?

POLLY. Oh, do go on, Sam, or I'll slap your face.

SAM. Well, then, you've 'eard me speak of old Binks, the plumber, glazier, and gasfitter, who died six months ago?

POLLY. Yes.

SAM [*sternly and deliberately*]. I've bought 'is business.

POLLY. No!

SAM [*excitedly*]. Yes, of 'is widow, old Mrs Binks—so much down, and so much more at the end of the year.

[*Dances and sings.*] "Ri-ti-toodle
Roodle-oodle
Ri-ti-tooral-lay."

POLLY. La, Sam!

SAM [*pacing stage up and down*]. Yes; I've bought the goodwill, fixtures, fittin's, stock, rolls of gas-pipe, and sheets of lead. [*Jumps on table, quickly facing* POLLY.] Yes, Polly, I'm a tradesman with a shop —a master tradesman. [*Coming to* POLLY *seriously*] All I want to complete the premises is a missus.

[*Tries to kiss her. She pushes him away.*

POLLY. Sam, don't be foolish!

SAM [*arm round her waist*]. Come and be Mrs Sam Gerridge, Polly, my patent-safety-day-and-night-light. You'll furnish me completely.

[SAM *watching* POLLY *admiringly, he then sees slate, snatches it up, and looks at it. She snatches it from him with a shriek, and rubs out writing, looking daggers at him.* SAM *laughing.*

SAM. Only to think now.

[*Putting arm round her waist,* POLLY *pouting.*

POLLY. Don't be a goose.

SAM [*going towards table*]. I spent the whole of yesterday lookin' up furniture. Now I bought that a bargain, and I brought it 'ere to show you for your approval. I've bought lots of other things, and I'll bring 'em all here to show yer for your approval.

POLLY. I couldn't think what had become of you.

SAM. Couldn't yer? Oh, I say, I want yer to choose the new paper for the little back parlour just behind the shop, you know. Now what d'yer think o' this? [*Fetching a pattern from piano and unrolling it.*

POLLY. No. I don't like that. [SAM *fetches the other, a flaming pattern.*] Ah! that's neat.

SAM. Yes, that's neat and quiet. I'll new-paper it, and new-furnish it, and it shall all be brand-new. [*Puts paper on top of piano.*

POLLY. But won't it cost a lot of money?

SAM [*bravely*]. I can work for it. With customers in the shop, and you in the back parlour, I can work like fifty men. [SAM *puts his arm round* POLLY, *sentimentally.*] Only fancy, at night, when the shop's closed, and the shutters are up, counting out the till together! [*Changing his manner*] Besides, that isn't all I've been doin'. I've been writin', and what I've written I've got printed.

POLLY. No!

SAM. True.

POLLY. You've been writing—about me?

SAM. No—about the shop. Here it is. [*Takes roll of circulars from pocket of his canvas slop.*] Yer mustn't laugh—you know—it's my first attempt. I wrote it the night before last; and when I thought of you the words seemed to flow like—red-hot solder. [*Reads.*] Hem! "Samuel Gerridge takes this opportunity of informin' the nobility, gentry, and inhabitants of the Borough Road——"

POLLY. The Borough Road?

SAM. Well, there ain't many of the nobility and gentry as lives in the Borough Road, but it pleases the inhabitants to make 'em believe yer think so [*resuming*]—" of informin' the nobility, gentry, and inhabitants of the Borough Road, and its vicinity—and its vicinity——" [*Looking at her*] Now, I think that's rather good, eh?

POLLY. Yes. [*Doubtfully*] I've heard worse.

SAM. I first thought of saying neighbour'ood; but then vicinity sounds so much more genteel [*resuming*]—"*and* its vicinity, that 'e has entered upon the business of the late Mr Binks, 'is relict, the present Mrs B., 'avin' disposed to 'im of the same "—now listen, Polly, because it gets interestin'—" S. G.——"

POLLY. S. G.—who's he?

SAM [*looking at* POLLY *with surprise*]. Why, me. S. G.—Samuel Gerridge—me, us. We're S. G. Now don't interrupt me, or you'll

cool my metal, and then I can't work. "S. G. 'opes that, by a constant attention to business, and "—mark this—" by supplyin' the best articles at the most reasonable prices, to merit a continuance of those favours which it will ever be 'is constant study to deserve." There! [*Triumphantly*] Stop a bit—there's a little bit more yet. "Bell-'angin', gas-fittin', plumbin', and glazin', as usual." There!—it's all my own.

[*Puts circular on mantelpiece, and contemplates it.*

POLLY. Beautiful, Sam. It looks very attractive from here, don't it?

[*Postman's knock.*

SAM. There's the postman. I'll go. I shall send some of these out by post. [*Goes off and returns with letter.*

POLLY [*taking it*]. Oh, for Esther. I know who it's from. [*Places letter on mantelpiece.*] Sam, who do you think was here last night?

SAM. Who?

POLLY. Captain Hawtree.

SAM [*deprecatingly*]. Oh, 'im!—come back from India, I suppose?

POLLY. Yes; luckily Esther was out.

SAM. I never liked that long swell. He was a 'uppish, conceited——

POLLY. Oh, he's better than he used to be—he's a major now. He's only been in England a fortnight.

SAM. Did he tell yer anything about poor De Alroy?

POLLY. Yes; he said he was riding out not far from the cantonment, and was surrounded by a troop of Sepoy cavalry, which took him prisoner, and galloped off with him.

SAM. But about 'is death?

POLLY. Oh! [*hiding her face*]—that he said was believed to be too terrible to mention.

SAM [*crossing to* POLLY]. Did 'e tell yer anything else?

POLLY. No; he asked a lot of questions, and I told him everything. How poor Esther had taken her widowhood, and what a dear, good baby the baby was, and what a comfort to us all, and how Esther had come back to live with us again.

SAM [*sharply*]. And the reason for it?

POLLY [*looking down*]. Yes.

SAM. How your father got all the money that 'e'd left for Esther?

POLLY [*sharply*]. Don't say any more about that, Sam.

SAM. Oh! I only think Captain 'Awtree ought to know where the money *did* go to, and you shouldn't try and screen your father, and let 'im suppose that you and Esther spent it all.

POLLY. I told him—I told him—I told him. [*Angrily.*

SAM. Did you tell 'im that your father was always at 'armonic meetin's at taverns, and 'ad 'arf cracked 'isself with drink, and was always singin' the songs and makin' the speeches 'e 'eard there, and was always goin' on about 'is wrongs as one of the workin' classes? 'E's a pretty

one for one of the workin' classes, 'e is! 'Asn't done a stroke o' work these twenty year. Now, I *am* one of the workin' classes, but I *don't* 'owl about it. I work, I don't spout.

POLLY. Hold your tongue, Sam. I won't have you say any more against poor Father. He has his faults, but he's a very clever man.

[*Sighing.*

SAM. Ah! What else did Captain 'Awtree say?

POLLY. He advised us to apply to Mr D'Alroy's mother.

SAM. What! the Marquissy? And what did you say to that?

POLLY. I said that Esther wouldn't hear of it. And so the Major said that he'd write to Esther, and I suppose this is the letter.

SAM. Now, Polly, come along and choose the paper for the little back parlour.

POLLY [*rising*]. Can't! Who's to mind Baby?

SAM. The *baby*? Oh, I forgot all about 'im. [*Goes to cradle.*] I see yer! [*Goes to window casually.*] There's your father comin' down the street. Won't 'e mind 'im?

POLLY. I dare say he will. If I promise him an extra sixpence on Saturday. [SAM *opens window.*] Hi! Father! [POLLY *goes to cradle.*

SAM [*aside*]. 'E looks down in the mouth, 'e does. I suppose 'e's 'ad no drink this mornin'.

[*Enter* ECCLES *in shabby black. Pauses on entering, looks at* SAM, *turns away in disgust, takes off hat, places it on piano, and shambles across the room and sits before fire.*

POLLY. Come in to stop a bit, Father?

ECCLES. No; not for long. Good morning, Samuel. Going back to work? that's right, my boy—stick to it. Stick to it—nothing like it.

SAM. Now, isn't that too bad! No, Mr Eccles. I've knocked off for the day.

ECCLES. That's bad! That's very bad! Nothing like work—for the young. I don't work so much as I used to, myself, but I like to see the young 'uns at it. It does me good, and it does them good too. What does the poet say? [*Rising, impressively, and leaning on table.*

"A carpenter said tho' that was well spoke,
It was better by far to defend it with hoak.
A currier, wiser than both put together,
Said say what you will, there is nothing like *labour*.
For a' that, an' a' that,
Your ribbon, gown, an' a' that,
The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The working man's the gold for a' that."

[*Sits again, triumphantly wagging his head.*

SAM [*aside*]. This is one of the public-house loafers that wants all the wages and none of the work, an idle old——

[*Goes in disgust to piano, puts on cap, and takes rolls of paper under his arm.*

POLLY [*to* ECCLES]. Esther will be in by and by. [*Persuasive*] Do, Father!

ECCLES. No, no. I tell you I won't!

POLLY [*whispering, arm round his neck*]. And I'll give you sixpence extra on Saturday.

[ECCLES' *face relaxes into a broad grin.* POLLY *gets hat and cloak.*

ECCLES. Ah! you sly little puss, you know how to get over your poor old father.

SAM [*aside*]. Yes, with sixpence.

POLLY [*putting on bonnet and cloak at door*]. Give the cradle a rock if Baby cries.

SAM [*crossing to* ECCLES]. If you should 'appen to want employment or amusement, Mr Eccles, just cast your eye over this. [*Puts circular on table.*] Stop a bit, I've forgot to give the baby one.

[*Throws circular into cradle. Exeunt,* POLLY *first.* ECCLES *takes out pipe from pocket, looks into it, then blows through it making a squeaking noise and finishes by tenderly placing it on the table. He then hunts all his pockets for tobacco, finally finding a little paper packet containing a screw of tobacco in his right-hand waistcoat-pocket, which he also places on table, after turning up the corner of the tablecloth for the purpose of emptying the contents of his pocket of the few remnants of past screws of tobacco on to the bare table and mixing a little out of the packet with it and filling pipe. He then brushes all that remains on the table into the paper packet, pinches it up, and carefully replaces it in waistcoat-pocket. Having put the pipe into his mouth, he looks about for a light, across his shoulder and under table, though never rising from the chair; seeing nothing his face assumes an expression of comic anguish. Turning to table he angrily replaces tablecloth and then notices* SAM's *circular. His face relaxes into a smile, and picking it up tears the circular in half, makes a spill of it, and, lighting it at fire, stands with his back to fireplace and smokes vigorously.*

ECCLES. Poor Esther! Nice market she's brought her pigs to—ugh! Mind the baby indeed! What good is he to me? That fool of a girl to throw away all her chances!—a *honourable-hess*—and her father not to have on him the price of a pint of early beer or a quartern of cool,

refreshing gin! Stopping in here to rock a young honourable! Cuss him! Are we slaves, we working men?

[*Sings savagely.*] "Britons never, never, never shall be——"

[*Nodding his head sagaciously*] I won't stand this. I've writ to the old cat—I mean to the Marquissy—to tell her that her daughter-in-law and her grandson is almost starving. That fool Esther's too proud to write to her for money. I hate pride—it's *beastly*! There's no beastly pride about me. [*Smacking his lips*] I'm as dry as a lime-kiln. [*Takes up jug.*] Milk!—[*with disgust*]—for this young aristocratic pauper. Everybody in the house is sacrificed for him! [*At foot of cradle*] And to think that a *working man*, and a member of the Committee of the Banded Brothers for the Regeneration of Human Kind, by means of equal diffusion of intelligence and equal division of property, should be thusty, while this cub—— [*Draws aside curtain, and looks at child After a pause*] That there coral he's got round his neck is *gold*, real *gold*! Oh, Society! Oh, Governments! Oh, Class Legislation!—*is this right?* Shall this mindless wretch enjoy himself, while sleeping, with a jewelled gawd, and his poor old grandfather want the price of half a pint? *No!* it shall not be! Rather than see it, I will myself resent this outrage on the rights of man! and in this holy crusade of class against class, of the weak and lowly against the *powerful and strong*—[*pointing to child*]—I will strike one blow for freedom! [*Goes to back of cradle.*] He's alseep. It will fetch ten bob round the corner; and if the Marquissy gives us anythink it can be got out with some o' that. [*Steals coral.*] Lie still, my darling! —it's Grandfather's a-watching over you—

"Who ran to catch me when I fell,
And kicked the place to make it well?
My grandfather!"

[*Rocking cradle with one hand; leaves it quickly, and as he takes hat off piano* ESTHER *enters. She is dressed as a widow, her face pale, and her manner quick and imperious. She carries a parcel and paper bag of rusks in her hand; she puts parcel on table, goes to cradle, kneels down, and kisses child.*] My lovey had a nice walk? You should wrap yourself up well —you're so liable to catch cold!

ESTHER. My Georgey?—Where's his coral? [ECCLES *fumbles with the lock nervously, and is going out as* ESTHER *speaks.*] Gone!—Father!—[*rising*—ECCLES *stops*]—The child's coral—where is it?

ECCLES [*confused*]. Where's what, ducky?

ESTHER. The coral! You've got it—I know it! Give it me!—[*quickly and imperiously*]—*Give it me!* [ECCLES *takes coral from his pocket and gives it back.*] If you *dare* to touch *my* child——

[*Goes to cradle.*

ECCLES. Esther! [*Going quickly to piano and banging his hat on it*] Am I not your father?

ESTHER. And I am his mother!

ECCLES [*coming to her*]. Do you bandy words with me, you pauper! you pauper!! you pauper!!! to whom I have given shelter—shelter to you and your brat! I've a good mind—— [*Raising his clenched fist.*

ESTHER [*confronting him*]. If you dare! I am no longer your little drudge—your frightened servant. When Mother died—[ECCLES *changes countenance and cowers beneath her glance*]—and I was so high, I tended you, and worked for you—and you beat me. That time is past. I am a woman—I am a wife—a widow—a *mother*! [*Pointing to cradle*] Do you think I will let you outrage *him*? [*Advancing a step*] *Touch me if you dare!*

ECCLES [*bursting into tears*]. And this is my own child, which I nussed when a babby, and sung *Cootsicum Coo* to afore she could speak. [*Gets hat from piano, and returns a step or two.*] Honourable Mrs De Alroy, I forgive you for all that you have said. I forgive you for all that you have done. In everything that I have done I have acted with the best intentions. May the babe in that cradle never treat you as you have this day *tret* a grey-'aired father. May he never cease to love and *h*onour you, as you have ceased to love and *h*onour me, after all that I have done for you, and the position to which I 'ave raised you by my own *industry*. [*Goes to door.*] May he never behave to you like the bad daughters of King Lear; and may you never live to feel how much more sharper than a serpent's [*slight pause, as if remembering quotation*] scale it is to have a thankless child! [*Exit.*

ESTHER [*kneeling back of cradle*]. My darling! [*Arranging bed and placing coral to the baby's lips, and then to her own*] Mamma's come back to her own. Did she stay away from him so long? [*Rises, and looks at the sabre, etc.*] My George! to think that you can never look upon his face or hear his voice. My brave, gallant, handsome husband! My lion and my love! [*Comes down centre, pacing the stage*] Oh! to be a soldier, and to fight the wretches who destroyed him—who took my darling from me! [*Action of cutting with sabre.*] To gallop miles upon their upturned faces. [*Crossing, left, with action—breaks down sobbing at mantelpiece—sees letter.*] What's this?—Captain Hawtree's hand. [*Sitting in chair, reads, at left hand of table.*] "My dear Mrs D'Alroy,—I returned to England less than a fortnight ago. I have some papers and effects of my poor friend's, which I am anxious to deliver to you, and I beg of you to name a day when I can call with them and see you; at the same time let me express my deepest sympathy with your affliction. Your husband's loss was mourned by every man in the regiment. [ESTHER *lays the letter on her heart, and then resumes reading.*] I have heard with great pain of the pecuniary embarrassments into which

accident and the imprudence of others have placed you. I trust you will not consider me, one of poor George's oldest comrades and friends, either intrusive or impertinent in sending the enclosed [*she takes out a cheque*], and in hoping that, should any further difficulties arise, you will inform me of them, and remember that I am, dear Mrs D'Alroy, now, and always, your faithful and sincere friend, Arthur Hawtree." [ESTHER *goes to cradle, and bends over it.*] Oh, *his* boy, if you could read it!

[*Sobs, with head on head of cradle.*

[*Enter* POLLY.

POLLY. Father gone!

ESTHER. Polly, you look quite flurried.

[POLLY *laughs, and whispers to* ESTHER.

ESTHER [*near head of table. Taking* POLLY *in her arms and kissing her*]. So soon? Well—my darling, I hope you may be happy.

POLLY. Yes. Sam's going to speak to Father about it this afternoon. Did you see the agent, dear?

ESTHER. Yes; the manager didn't come—he broke his appointment again.

POLLY. Nasty, rude fellow!

ESTHER. The agent said it didn't matter, he thought I should get the engagement. He'll only give me thirty shillings a week, though.

POLLY. But you said that two pounds was the regular salary.

ESTHER. Yes, but they know I'm poor and want the engagement, and so take advantage of me.

POLLY. Never mind, Esther. I put the dress in that bandbox. It looks almost as good as new.

ESTHER. I've had a letter from Captain Hawtree.

POLLY. I know, dear; he came here last night.

ESTHER. A dear, good letter—speaking of George, and enclosing me a cheque for thirty pounds.

POLLY. Oh, how kind! Don't you tell Father.

[*Noise of carriage-wheels without.*

ESTHER. I shan't. [ECCLES *enters, breathless.* ESTHER *and* POLLY *rise.*

ECCLES. It's the Marquissy in her coach. [ESTHER *puts on the lid of bandbox.*] Now, girls, do be civil to her, and she may do something for us. [*Places hat on piano.*] I see the coach as I was coming out of the Rainbow.

[*Hastily pulls an old comb out of his pocket, and puts his hair in order.*

ESTHER. The Marquise!

[ESTHER *comes down to end of table,* POLLY *holding her hand.*

ECCLES [*at door*]. This way, my lady—up them steps. They're rather awkward for the likes o' you; but them as is poor and lowly must do as best they can with steps and circumstances.

[*Enter* MARQUISE. *She surveys the place with aggressive astonishment.*

MARQUISE [*half aside*]. What a hole! And to think that my grandson should breathe such an atmosphere, and be contaminated by such associations! [*To* ECCLES] Which is the young woman who married my son?

ESTHER. I am Mrs George D'Alroy, widow of George D'Alroy. Who are you?

MARQUISE. I am his mother, the Marquise de Saint Maur.

ESTHER [*with the grand air*]. Be seated, I beg.

[ECCLES *takes chair which* ESTHER *immediately seizes as* SAM *enters with an easy-chair on his head, which he puts down, not seeing* MARQUISE, *who instantly sits down in it, concealing it completely.*

SAM [*astonished*]. It's the Marquissy! [*Looking at her*] My eye! These aristocrats are fine women—plenty of 'em—[*describing circle*] quality and quantity!

POLLY. Go away, Sam; you'd better come back.

[ECCLES *nudges him, and bustles him towards door. Exit* SAM ECCLES *shuts door on him.*

ECCLES [*rubbing his hands*]. If we'd a know'd your ladyship had bin a-coming we'd a had the place cleaned up a bit.

POLLY. Hold your tongue, Father! [ECCLES *crushed.*

MARQUISE [*to* ESTHER]. You remember me, do you not?

ESTHER. Perfectly, though I only saw you once. May I ask what has procured me the honour of this visit?

MARQUISE. I was informed that you were in want, and I came to offer you assistance.

ESTHER. I thank you for your offer, and the delicate consideration for my feelings with which it is made. I need no assistance.

[ECCLES *groans and leans on piano.*

MARQUISE. A letter I received last night informed me that you did.

ESTHER. May I ask if that letter came from Captain Hawtree?

MARQUISE. No—from this person—your father, I think.

ESTHER [*to* ECCLES]. How dare you interfere in my affairs?

ECCLES. My lovey, I did it with the best intentions.

MARQUISE. Then you will not accept assistance from me?

ESTHER. No.

POLLY [*aside to* ESTHER, *holding her hand*]. Bless you, my darling!

MARQUISE. But you have a child—a son—my grandson.

[*With emotion.*

ESTHER. Master D'Alroy wants for nothing.

POLLY [*aside*]. And never shall. [ECCLES *groans.*

MARQUISE. I came here to propose that my grandson should go back with me. [POLLY *rushes up to cradle.*

ESTHER [*rising defiantly*]. What! part with my boy! I'd sooner die!

MARQUISE. You can see him when you wish. As for money, I——

ESTHER. Not for ten thousand million worlds—not for ten thousand million marchionesses!

ECCLES. Better do what the good lady asks you, my dear; she's advising you for your own good, and for the child's likewise.

MARQUISE. Surely you cannot intend to bring up my son's son in a place like this?

ESTHER. I do.

ECCLES. It *is* a poor place, and we are poor people, sure enough. We ought not to fly in the faces of our pastors and masters—our pastresses and mistresses.

POLLY [*aside*]. Oh, hold your tongue, do!

ESTHER [*before cradle*]. Master George D'Alroy will remain with his mother. The offer to take him from her is an insult to his dead father and to him.

ECCLES [*aside*]. He don't seem to feel it, stuck-up little beast!

MARQUISE. But you have no money—how can you rear him?—how can you educate him?—how can you live?

ESTHER [*tearing dress from bandbox*]. Turn Columbine—go on the stage again and dance!

MARQUISE [*rising*]. You are insolent—you forget that I am a lady.

ESTHER. You forget that I am a mother. Do you dare to offer to buy my child—*his* breathing image, *his* living memory—with money? [*Crosses to door, and throws it open.*] There is the door—go!

ECCLES [*to* MARQUISE, *who has risen, aside*]. Very sorry, my lady, as you should be tret in this way, which was not my wishes.

MARQUISE. Silence! [ECCLES *retreats, putting back chair,* MARQUISE *goes up to door.*] Mrs D'Alroy, if anything could have increased my sorrow for the wretched marriage my poor son was *decoyed* into, it would be your conduct this day to his mother. [*Exit.*

ESTHER [*falling in* POLLY'S *arms*]. Oh, Polly! Polly!

ECCLES [*looking after her*]. To go away, and not to leave a sov behind her! [*Running up to open door*] Cat! Cat! Stingy old cat!

[*Almost runs to fire, sits, and pokes it violently; carriage-wheels heard without.*

ESTHER. I'll go to my room and lie down. Let me have the baby, or that old woman may come back and steal him.

[*Exit* ESTHER. POLLY *follows with the baby.*

ECCLES. Well, women is the obstinatest devils as never wore horse-shoes. Children? Beasts! Beasts! [*Enter* SAM *and* POLLY.

SAM. Come along, Polly, and let's get it over at once. Now, Mr ECCLES [ECCLES *turns suddenly, facing* SAM], since you've been talkin' on family matters, I'd like to 'ave a word with yer, so take this opportunity to——

ECCLES [*waving his hand grandly*]. Take what you like, and then order more [*rising, and leaning over table*], Samuel Gerridge. That hand is a hand that never turned its back on a friend, or a bottle to give him.

[*Sings.*] "I'll stand by my friend,
I'll stand by my friend,
I'll stand by my friend,
If he'll stand to me—me, genelmen!"

SAM. Well, Mr Eccles, sir, it's this——

POLLY [*aside*]. Don't tell him too sudden, Sam—it might shock his feelings.

SAM. It's this: Yer know that for the last four years I've been keepin' company with Mary—Polly.

[*Turning to her and smiling.* ECCLES *drops into chair as if shot.*

ECCLES. Go it! go it! strike home, young man! Strike on this grey head! [*Sings.*] "Britons, strike home!" Here [*tapping his chest*], to my heart! Don't spare me. Have a go at my grey hairs. Pull 'em—pull 'em out! A long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull all together!

[*Cries, and drops his face on arm, upon table.*

POLLY. Oh, Father! I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world.

[*Patting his head.*

SAM. No; Mr Eccles, I don't want to 'urt your feelin's, but I'm a-goin' to enter upon a business. Here's a circ'lar. [*Offering one.*

ECCLES [*indignantly*]. Circ'lars. What are circ'lars compared to a father's feelings?

SAM. And I want Polly to name the day, sir, and so I ask you——

ECCLES. This is 'ard, this is 'ard. One of my daughters marries a soger. The other goes a-gasfitting.

SAM [*annoyed*]. The business which will enable me to maintain a wife is that of the late Mr Binks, plumber, glazier, *et cetera.*

ECCLES [*rising, sings*]. [*Air "Lost Rosabelle."*

"They have given thee to a plumber,
They have broken every vow,
They have given thee to a plumber,
And my heart, my heart is breaking now."

[*Drops into chair again.*

Now, genelmen!

[SAM *thrusts circulars into his pocket and turns away angrily.*

POLLY. You know, Father, you can come and see me.

SAM [*sotto voce*]. No, no.

ECCLES [*looking up*]. So I can, and that's a comfort. [*Shaking her hand*] And you can come and see me, and that's a comfort. I'll come and see you often—very often—every day [SAM *turns up stage in horror*], and crack a fatherly bottle [*rising*] and shed a friendly tear.

[*Wipes eyes with dirty pocket-handkerchief, which he pulls from breast-pocket.*

POLLY. Do, Father, do. [*Goes up and gets tea-tray.*

SAM [*with a gulp*]. Yes, Mr Eccles, do.

ECCLES. I will. And this it is to be a father. I would part with any of my children for their own good, readily—if I was paid for it. [*Sings.*] "For I know that the angels are whispering to me"—me, genelmen!

[POLLY *gets tea-things.*

SAM. I'll try and make Polly a good husband, and anything that I can do to prove it [*lowering his voice*], in the way of spirituous liquors and tobacco [*slipping coin into his hand, unseen by* POLLY] shall be done.

ECCLES [*lightening up and placing his left hand on* SAM's *head*].

"Be kind to thy father,
Wherever you be,
For he is a blessing
And credit to thee—thee, genelmen."

Well, my children—bless you, take the blessing of a grey-'aired father, Samuel Gerridge, she shall be thine. [*Mock heroically, looking at money.* You shall be his wife [*looking at* POLLY], and you [*looking at* SAM] shall be her husband—for a husband I know no fitter—no 'gas-fitter' man. [*Runs to piano and takes hat; looks comically pathetic at* SAM *and* POLLY] *puts on hat, and comes towards centre.*] I've a friend waiting for me round the corner, which I want to have a word with; and may you never know how much more sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a marriageable daughter.

[*Sings.*] "When I heard she was married
I breathed not a tone,
The heyes of all round me
Was fixed on my hown;
I flew to my chamber
To hide my despair,
I tore the bright circlet
Of gems from my hair.
When I heard she was married,
When I heard she was married——"

[*Breaks down. Exit.*

POLLY [*drying her eyes*]. There, Sam. I always told you that though Father had his faults, his heart was in the right place.

SAM. Poor Polly! [*Knock at door.*

POLLY [*top of table*]. Come in! [*Enter* HAWTREE.

POLLY. Major Hawtree.

[SAM *turns away as they shake hands, centre of stage.*

HAWTREE. I met the Marquise's carriage on the bridge. Has she been here?

POLLY. Yes.

HAWTREE. What happened?

POLLY. Oh, she wanted to take away the child.

SAM. In the coach. [POLLY *sets tea-things.*

HAWTREE. And what did Mrs D'Alroy say to that?

SAM. Mrs D'Alroy said that she'd see her blow'd first! or words to that effect.

HAWTREE. I'm sorry to hear this; I had hoped—however, that's over.

POLLY. Yes, it's over; and I hope we shall hear no more about it. Want to take away the child, indeed—like her impudence! What next! Esther's gone to lie down. I shan't wake her up for tea, though she's had nothing to eat all day.

SAM. Shall I fetch some shrimps?

POLLY. No. What made you think of shrimps?

SAM. They're a relish, and consolin'—at least I always found 'em so.

POLLY. I won't ask you to take tea with us, Major—you're too grand.

HAWTREE [*placing hat on piano*]. Not at all. I shall be most happy. [*Aside*] 'Pon my word, these are very good sort of people. I'd no idea——

SAM. He's a-going to stop to tea—well, I ain't.

[*Goes up to window and sits.* HAWTREE *crosses and sits right of table.*

POLLY. Sam! Sam! [*Pause. He says "Eh?"*] Pull down the blind and light the gas.

SAM. No, don't light up; I like this sort of dusk. It's unbusinesslike, but pleasant.

[SAM *cuts enormous slice of bread, and hands it on point of knife to* HAWTREE. *Cuts small lump of butter, and hands it on point of knife to* HAWTREE, *who looks at it through eyeglass, then takes it.* SAM *then helps himself.* POLLY *meantime has poured out tea in two cups, and one saucer for* SAM, *sugars them, and then hands cup and saucer to* HAWTREE, *who has both hands full. He takes it awkwardly, and places it on table.* POLLY, *having only one spoon, tastes* SAM's *tea, then stirs* HAWTREE's, *attracting his attention by so doing.*

*He looks into his tea-cup.* POLLY *stirs her own tea, and drops spoon into* HAWTREE'S *cup, causing it to spurt in his eye. He drops eyeglass and wipes his eyes.*

POLLY [*making tea*]. Sugar, Sam! [SAM *takes tea and sits facing fire.*] Oh, there isn't any milk—it'll be here directly, it's just his time.

VOICE [*outside; rattle of milk-pails*]. Mia-oow!

POLLY. There he is. [*Knock at door.*] Oh, I know; I owe him fourpence. [*Feeling her pockets*] Sam, have you got fourpence?

[*Knock again, louder.*

SAM. No [*his mouth full*]—I ain't got no fourpence.

POLLY. He's very impatient. Come in!

[*Enter* GEORGE, *his face bronzed, and in full health. He carries a milk-can in his hand, which, after putting his hat on piano, he places on table.*

GEORGE. A fellow hung this on the railings, so I brought it in.

[POLLY *sees him, and gradually sinks down under the table, right, Then* SAM, *with his mouth full, and bread and butter in hand. does the same, left.* HAWTREE *pushes himself back a space, in chair, remains motionless.* GEORGE *astonished. Picture.*

GEORGE. What's the matter with you?

HAWTREE [*rising*]. George!

GEORGE. Hawtree! You here?

POLLY [*under table*]. O-o-o-o-oh! the ghost!—the ghost!

SAM. It shan't hurt you, Polly. Perhaps it's only indigestion.

HAWTREE. Then you are not dead?

GEORGE. Dead, no. Where's my wife?

HAWTREE. You were reported killed.

GEORGE. It wasn't true.

HAWTREE. Alive! My old friend alive!

GEORGE. And well. [*Shakes hands.*] Landed this morning. Where's my wife?

SAM [*who has popped his head from under tablecloth*]. He ain't dead, Poll—he's alive! [POLLY *rises from under table slowly.*

POLLY [*pause; approaches him, touches him, retreats*]. George! [*He nods.*] George! George!

GEORGE. Yes! Yes!

POLLY. Alive!—My dear George!—Oh, my dear brother!—[*looking at him intensely*]—Alive! [*Going to him*] Oh, my dear, dear brother!—[*in his arms*]—how could you go and do so? [*Laughs hysterically.*

[*Pause.*

GEORGE. Where's Esther?

HAWTREE. Here—in this house.

GEORGE. Here!—doesn't she know I'm back?

POLLY. No; how should she?

GEORGE [*to* HAWTREE]. Didn't you get my telegram?

HAWTREE. No; where from?

GEORGE. Southampton! I sent it to the Club.

HAWTREE. I haven't been there these three days.

POLLY [*hysterically*]. Oh, my dear, dear, dear dead-and-gone!—come back all alive, oh, brother George!

SAM. Glad to see yer, sir.

GEORGE. Thank you, Gerridge. [*Shakes hands.*] Same to you—but Esther?

POLLY [*back to audience, and 'kerchief to her eyes*]. She's asleep in her room. [GEORGE *is going to door;* POLLY *stops him.*

POLLY. You mustn't see her!

GEORGE. Not see her!—after this long absence?—why not?

HAWTREE. She's ill to-day. She has been greatly excited. The news of your death, which we all mourned, has shaken her terribly.

GEORGE. Poor girl! poor girl!

POLLY. Oh, we all cried so when you died!—[*crying*]—and now you're alive again, I want to cry ever so much more! [*Crying.*

HAWTREE. We must break the news to her gently and by degrees.

[*Crosses to fire, taking his tea with him.*

SAM. Yes. If you turn the tap on to full pressure, she'll explode!

[SAM *turns to* HAWTREE, *who is just raising cup to his lips, and brings it down on saucer with a bang; both annoyed.*

GEORGE. To return, and not to be able to see her—to love her—to kiss her! [*Stamps.*

POLLY. Hush!

GEORGE. I forgot! I shall wake her!

POLLY. More than that—you'll wake the baby!

GEORGE. Baby!—what baby?

POLLY. Yours.

GEORGE. Mine?—mine?

POLLY. Yes—yours and Esther's! Why, didn't you know there was a baby?

GEORGE. No!

POLLY. La! the ignorance of these men!

HAWTREE. Yes, George, you're a father.

GEORGE. Why wasn't I told of this? Why didn't you write?

POLLY. How could we when you were dead?

SAM. And 'adn't left your address.

[*Looks at* HAWTREE, *who turns away quickly.*

GEORGE. If I can't see Esther, I will see the child. The sight of me won't be too much for its nerves. Where is it?

POLLY. Sleeping in its mother's arms. [GEORGE *goes to door; she intercepts him.*] Please not! Please not!

GEORGE. I must. I will.

POLLY. It might kill her, and you wouldn't like to do that. I'll fetch the baby; but, oh, please don't make a noise! You won't make a noise—you'll be as quiet as you can, won't you? Oh! I can't believe it. [*Exit* POLLY.

[SAM *dances break-down and finishes up looking at* HAWTREE, *who turns away astonished.* SAM *disconcerted;* GEORGE *at door.*

GEORGE. My baby; my ba—— It's a dream! You've seen it. [*To* SAM] What's it like?

SAM. Oh! it's like a—like a sort of—infant—white and—milky, and all that.

[*Enter* POLLY, *with baby wrapped in shawls.* GEORGE *shuts door and meets her.*

POLLY. Gently, gently—take care! Esther will hardly have it touched. [SAM *rises and gets near to* GEORGE.

GEORGE. But I'm its father.

POLLY. That don't matter. She's very particular.

GEORGE. Boy or girl?

POLLY. Guess.

GEORGE. Boy! [POLLY *nods.* GEORGE *proud.*] What's his name?

POLLY. Guess.

GEORGE. George? [POLLY *nods.*] Eustace? [POLLY *nods.*] Fairfax? Algernon? [POLLY *nods; pause.*] My names!

SAM [*to* GEORGE]. You'd 'ardly think there was room enough in 'im to 'old so many names, would yer?

[HAWTREE *looks at him—turns to fire.* SAM *disconcerted again.*

GEORGE. To come back all the way from India to find that I'm dead, and that you're alive. To find my wife a widow with a new love aged—— How old are you? I'll buy you a pony to-morrow, my brave little boy! What's his weight? I should say two pound nothing. My—baby—my—boy! [*Bends over him and kisses him.*] Take him away, Polly, for fear I should break him.

[POLLY *takes child, and places it in cradle.*

HAWTREE [*crosses to piano. Passes* SAM *front—stares.* SAM *goes round to fireplace, flings down bread and butter in a rage and drinks his tea out of saucer.*] But tell us how it is you're back—how you escaped.

GEORGE. By and by. Too long a story just now. Tell *me* all about it. [POLLY *gives him chair.*] How is it Esther's living here?

POLLY. She came back after the baby was born and the furniture was sold up.

GEORGE. Sold up? What furniture?

POLLY. That you bought for her.

HAWTREE. It couldn't be helped, George—Mrs D'Alroy was so poor.

GEORGE. Poor! but I left her six hundred pounds to put in the bank!

HAWTREE. We '*must*' tell you. She gave it to her father, who banked it in his own name.

SAM. And lost it in bettin'—every copper.

GEORGE. Then she's been in want?

POLLY. No—not in want. Friends lent her money.

GEORGE. What friends? [*Pause; he looks at* POLLY, *who indicates* HAWTREE.] You?

POLLY. Yes.

GEORGE [*rising, and shaking* HAWTREE's *hand*]. Thank you, old fella. [HAWTREE *droops his head.*

SAM [*aside*]. Now who'd ha' thought that long swell 'ad it in 'im? 'E never mentioned it.

GEORGE. So Papa Eccles had the money? [*Sitting again.*

SAM. And blued it! [*Sits on left corner of table.*

POLLY [*pleadingly*]. You see, Father was very unlucky on the race-course. He told us that if it hadn't been that all his calculations were upset by a horse winning who had no business to, he should have made our fortunes. Father's been unlucky, and he gets tipsy at times, but he's a very clever man, if you only give him scope enough.

SAM. I'd give 'im scope enough!

GEORGE. Where is he now?

SAM. Public-house.

GEORGE. And how is he?

SAM. Drunk! [POLLY *pushes him off table.* SAM *sits at fireplace.*

GEORGE [*to* HAWTREE]. You were right. There is '*something*' in caste. [*Aloud*] But tell us all about it.

POLLY. Well, you know, you went away; and then the baby was born. Oh! he was such a sweet little thing, just like—your eyes—your hair.

GEORGE. Cut that!

POLLY. Well, baby came; and when baby was six days old your letter came, Major [*to* HAWTREE]. I saw that it was from India, and that it wasn't in your hand [*to* GEORGE]; I guessed what was inside it, so I opened it unknown to her, and I read there of your capture and death. I daren't tell her. I went to Father to ask his advice, but he was too tipsy to understand me. Sam fetched the doctor. He told us that the news would kill her. When she woke up she said she had dreamt there was a letter from you. I told her no; and day after day she asked for a letter. So the doctor advised us to write one as if it came from you. So we did. Sam and I and the doctor told her—told Esther, I mean, that her eyes were bad, and she mustn't read, and we read our letter to her; didn't we, Sam? But, bless you! she always knew it hadn't come from you! At last, when she was stronger, we told her all.

GEORGE [*after a pause*]. How did she take it?

POLLY. She pressed the baby in her arms, and turned her face to the wall. [*A pause.*] Well, to make a long story short, when she got up she found that Father had lost all the money you left her. There was a dreadful scene between them. She told him he'd robbed her and her child, and Father left the house, and swore he'd never come back again.

SAM. Don't be alarmed—'e did come back.

POLLY. Oh, yes; he was too good-hearted to stop long from his children. He has his faults, but his good points, when you find 'em, are wonderful!

SAM. Yes, when you find 'em!

[*Rises, gets bread and butter from table, and sits by table.*

POLLY. So she had to come back here to us; and that's all.

GEORGE. Why didn't she write to my mother?

POLLY. Father wanted her; but she was too proud—she said she'd die first.

GEORGE [*rising, to* HAWTREE]. There's a woman! Caste's all humbug. [*Sees sword over mantelpiece.*] That's my sword and a map of India, and that's the piano I bought her—I'll swear to the silk!

POLLY. Yes; that was bought in at the sale.

GEORGE [*to* HAWTREE]. Thank ye, old fella!

HAWTREE. Not by me;—I was in India at the time.

GEORGE. By whom, then?

POLLY. By Sam. [SAM *winks to her to discontinue.*] I shall! He knew Esther was breaking her heart about anyone else having it, so he took the money he'd saved up for our wedding, and we're going to be married now—ain't we, Sam?

SAM [*rushing to* GEORGE *and pulling out circulars from pocket*]. And hope by constant attention to business to merit——

POLLY. Since you died it hasn't been opened, but if I don't play it to-night, may I die an old maid!

[GEORGE *crosses to* SAM, *and shakes his hand, then goes up stage, pulls up blind, and looks into street.* SAM *turns up and meets* POLLY *top of table.*

HAWTREE [*aside*]. Now who'd have thought that little cad had it in him? He never mentioned it. [*Aloud*] *Apropos*, George, your mother—I'll go to the square and tell her of——

GEORGE. Is she in town?

HAWTREE. Yes. Will you come with me?

GEORGE. And leave my wife?—and such a wife!

HAWTREE. I'll go at once. I shall catch her before dinner. Good-bye, old fellow. Seeing you back again, alive and well, makes me feel quite—that I quite feel—— [*Shakes* GEORGE'S *hand. Goes to door, then crosses to* SAM, *who has turned* POLLY'S *tea into his saucer, and is just*

*about to drink; seeing* HAWTREE, *he puts it down quickly, and turns his back.*] Mr Gerridge, I fear I have often made myself very offensive to you.

SAM. Well, sir, yer 'ave!

HAWTREE. I feared so. I didn't know you then. I beg your pardon. Let me ask you to shake hands—to forgive me, and forget it.

[*Offering his hand.*

SAM [*taking it*]. Say no more, sir; and if ever I've made myself offensive to you, I ask your pardon; forget it, and forgive me. [*They shake hands warmly; as* HAWTREE *crosses to door, recovering from* SAM'S *hearty shake of the hand,* SAM *runs to him.*] Hi, sir! When yer marry that young lady as I know you're engaged to, if you should furnish a house, and require anything in my way——

[*Bringing out circular; begins to read it.* POLLY *pushes* SAM *away.* SAM *goes and sits in low chair by fireplace, disconcerted, cramming circulars into his pocket.*

HAWTREE. Good-bye, George, for the present. [*At door*] 'Bye, Polly. [*Resumes his Pall Mall manner as he goes out.*] I'm off to the square.

[*Exit* HAWTREE.

GEORGE [*at cradle*]. But Esther?

POLLY. Oh, I forgot all about Esther. I'll tell her all about it.

GEORGE. How?

POLLY. I don't know; but it will come. Providence will send it to me, as it has sent you, my dear brother. [*Embracing him*] You don't know how glad I am to see you back again! You must go. [*Pushing him.* GEORGE *takes hat off piano.*] Esther will be getting up directly. [*At door with* GEORGE, *who looks through keyhole.*] It's no use looking there; it's dark.

GEORGE. It isn't often a man can see his own widow.

POLLY. And it isn't often that he wants to! Now you must go.

[*Pushing him off.*

GEORGE. I shall stop outside.

SAM. And I'll whistle for you when you may come in.

POLLY. Now—hush!

GEORGE [*opening door wide*]. Oh, my Esther, when you know I'm alive! I'll marry you all over again, and we'll have a second honeymoon, my darling. [*Exit.*

POLLY. Oh, Sam! Sam! [*Commences to sing and dance.* SAM *also dances; they meet in centre of stage, join hands, and dance around two or three times, leaving* SAM *left of* POLLY, *near table.*] Oh, Sam, I'm so excited, I don't know what to do. What shall I do—what shall I do?

SAM [*taking up* HAWTREE'S *bread and butter*]. 'Ave a bit of bread and butter, Polly.

POLLY. Now, Sam, light the gas; I'm going to wake her up. [*Opening the door.*] Oh, my darling, if I dare tell you! [*Whispering*] He's come back! He's come back! He's come back! Alive! Alive! Alive! Sam, kiss me!

[SAM *rushes to* POLLY, *kisses her, and she jumps off,* SAM *shutting the door.*

SAM [*dances shutter dance*]. I'm glad the swells are gone; now I can open my safety-valve and let my feelin's escape. To think of 'is comin' back alive from India, just as I am goin' to open my shop. Perhaps he'll get me the patronage of the Royal Family. It would look stunnin' over the door, a lion and a unicorn a-standin' on their 'ind-legs, doin' nothin' furiously, with a lozenge between 'em—thus. [*Seizes plate on table, puts his left foot on chair right of table, and imitates the picture of the Royal arms.*] Polly said I was to light up, and whatever Polly says must be done. [*Lights brackets over mantelpiece, then candles; as he lights the broken one, says*] Why this one is for all the world like old Eccles! [*Places candles on piano, and sits on music-stool.*] Poor Esther! to think of my knowin' 'er when she was in the ballet line—then in the 'onourable line; then a mother—no, *h*onourables is 'mammas'—then a widow, and then in the ballet line again!—and 'im to come back [*growing affected*]—and find a baby, with all 'is furniture and fittin's ready for immediate use—and she, poor thing, lyin' asleep, with 'er eye-lids 'ot and swollen, not knowin' that that great, big, 'eavy, 'ulking, overgrown dragoon is prowlin' outside, ready to fly at 'er lips, and strangle 'er in 'is strong, lovin' arms—it—it—it——

[*Breaks down and sobs with his head upon the table.*

[*Enter* POLLY.

POLLY. Why, Sam! What's the matter?

SAM [*rises*]. I dunno. The water's got into my meter.

POLLY. Hush! here's Esther. [*Enter* ESTHER. *They stop suddenly.*

SAM [*singing and dancing*]. "Tiddy-ti-tum," etc.

ESTHER [*sitting near fire, taking up costume and beginning to work*]. Sam, you seem in high spirits to-night?

SAM. Yes; yer see Polly and I are goin' to be married—and—and 'opes by bestowing a merit—to continue the favour——

POLLY [*who has kissed* ESTHER *two or three times*]. What are you talking about?

SAM. I don't know—I'm off my burner.

[POLLY *goes round to chair and sits facing* ESTHER.

ESTHER. What's the matter with you to-night, dear? I can see something in your eyes.

SAM. P'r'aps it's the new furniture! [*Sits on music-stool.*

ESTHER. Will you help me with the dress, Polly?

POLLY. It was a pretty dress when it was new—not unlike the one

Mademoiselle Delphine used to wear. [*Suddenly clapping her hands*] Oh!

ESTHER. What's the matter?

POLLY. A needle! [*Crosses to* SAM, *who examines finger.*] I've got it!

SAM. What—the needle—in your finger?

POLLY. No; an idea in my head!

SAM [*still looking at finger*]. Does it 'urt?

POLLY. Stupid! Do you recollect Mademoiselle Delphine, Esther?

ESTHER. Yes.

POLLY. Do you recollect her in that ballet that old Herr Griffenhaagen arranged?—*Jeanne la Folle; or, The Return of the Soldier*?

ESTHER. Yes; will you do the fresh hem?

POLLY. What's the use? Let me see—how did it go? How well I remember the scene!—the cottage was on that side, the bridge at the back—then ballet of villagers, and the entrance of Delphine as Jeanne, the bride—tra-lal-lala-lala-la-la [*sings and pantomimes,* SAM *imitating her*]. Then the entrance of Claude, the bridegroom—[*to* SAM, *imitating swell*] How-de-do? How-de-do?

SAM [*rising*]. 'Ow are yer? [*Imitating* POLLY, *then sitting again.*

POLLY. Then there was the procession to church—the march of the soldiers over the bridge—[*sings and pantomimes*]—arrest of Claude, who is drawn for the conscription [ESTHER *looks dreamily*], and is torn from the arms of his bride at the church porch. *Omnes* broken-hearted. *This is Omnes* broken-hearted. [*Pantomimes.*

ESTHER. Polly, I don't like this; it brings back memories.

POLLY [*going to table, and leaning her hands on it, looks over at* ESTHER]. Oh, fuss about memories!—one can't mourn for ever. [ESTHER *surprised.*] Everything in this world isn't sad. There's bad news, and—there's good news sometimes—when we least expect it.

ESTHER. Ah! not for me.

POLLY. Why not?

ESTHER [*anxiously*]. Polly!

POLLY. Second Act! [*This to be said quickly, startling* SAM, *who has been looking on the ground during the last four or five lines.*] Winter—the Village Pump. This is the village pump [*pointing to* SAM, *seated by piano, on music-stool.* SAM *turns round on music-stool, disgusted.*] Entrance of Jeanne—now called Jeanne la Folle, because she has gone mad on account of the supposed loss of her husband.

SAM. The supposed loss?

POLLY. The supposed loss!

ESTHER [*dropping costume*]. Polly!

SAM. Mind! [*Aside to* POLLY.

POLLY. Can't stop now! Entrance of Claude, *who isn't dead,* in a captain's uniform—a cloak thrown over his shoulders.

ESTHER. Not dead?

POLLY. Don't you remember the ballet? Jeanne is mad, and can't recognize her husband; and don't, till he shows her the ribbon she gave him when they were betrothed! A bit of ribbon! Sam, have you got a bit of ribbon? Oh, that crape sword-knot, that will do!

[SAM *astonished.*

ESTHER. Touch that! [*Rising.*

POLLY. Why not?—it's no use *now*!

ESTHER [*slowly, looking into* POLLY'S *eyes*]. You have heard of George—I know you have—I see it in your eyes. You may tell me—I can bear it—I can indeed—indeed I can. Tell me—he is not dead?

[*Violently agitated.*

POLLY. No!

ESTHER. No?

POLLY. No!

ESTHER [*whispers*]. Thank heaven! You've seen him—I see you have!—I know it!—I feel it! I had a bright and happy dream—I saw him as I slept! Oh, let me know if he is near! Give me some sign—some sound—[POLLY *opens piano*]—some token of his life and presence!

[SAM *touches* POLLY *on the shoulder, takes hat, and exits.* POLLY *sits immediately at piano and plays air softly—the same air played by* ESTHER, *Act II, on the treble only.*

ESTHER [*in an ecstasy*]. Oh, my husband! come to me! for I know that you are near! Let me feel your arms clasp round me!—Do not fear for me!—I can bear the sight of you!—[*Door opens, showing* SAM *keeping* GEORGE *back*]—it will not kill me!—George—love—husband—come, oh, come to me!

[GEORGE *breaks away from* SAM, *and coming down behind* ESTHER *places his hands over her eyes; she gives a faint scream, and, turning, falls in his arms.* POLLY *plays the bass as well as treble of the air, forte, then fortissimo. She then plays at random, endeavouring to hide her tears. At last strikes piano wildly, and goes off into a fit of hysterical laughter, to the alarm of* SAM, *who, rushing down as* POLLY *cries "Sam! Sam!" falls on his knees in front of her. They embrace,* POLLY *pushing him contemptuously away afterwards.* GEORGE *sits, and* ESTHER *kneels at his feet—he snatches off* ESTHER'S *cap, and throws it up stage.* POLLY *goes left of* GEORGE, SAM *brings music-stool, and she sits.*

ESTHER. To see you here again—to feel your warm breath upon my cheek—is it real, or am I dreaming?

SAM [*rubbing his head*]. No; it's real.

ESTHER [*embracing* GEORGE]. My darling!

SAM. My darling! [POLLY *on music-stool, which* SAM *has placed for*

*her.* SAM, *kneeling by her, imitates* ESTHER—POLLY *scornfully pushes him away.*] But tell us—tell us how you escaped.

GEORGE. It's a long story; but I'll condense it. I was riding out, and suddenly found myself surrounded and taken prisoner. One of the troop that took me was a fella who had been my servant, and to whom I had done some little kindness. He helped me to escape, and hid me in a sort of cave, and for a long time used to bring me food. Unfortunately, he was ordered away; so he brought another Sepoy to look after me. I felt from the first this man meant to betray me, and I watched him like a lynx during the one day he was with me. As evening drew on, a Sepoy picket was passing. I could tell by the look in the fella's eyes he meant to call out as soon as they were near enough; so I seized him by the throat, and shook the life out of him.

ESTHER. You strangled him?

GEORGE. Yes.

ESTHER. Killed him—dead?

GEORGE. He didn't get up again.

POLLY [*to* SAM]. *You* never go and kill Sepoys. [*Pushes him over.*

SAM. No! I pay rates and taxes.

GEORGE. The day after, Havelock and his Scotchmen marched through the village, and I turned out to meet them. I was too done up to join, so I was sent straight on to Calcutta. I got leave, took a berth on the P. and O. boat; the passage restored me. I landed this morning, came on here, and brought in the milk.

[*Enter the* MARQUISE; *she rushes to embrace* GEORGE. *All rise.*

MARQUISE. My dear boy!—my dear, dear boy!

POLLY. Why, see, she's crying! She's glad to see him alive, and back again.

SAM [*profoundly*]. Well! There's always some good in women, even when they're ladies.

MARQUISE [*crossing to* ESTHER]. My dear daughter, we must forget our little differences. [*Kissing her*] Won't you? How history repeats itself! You will find a similar and as unexpected a return mentioned by Froissart in the chapter that treats of Philip Dartnell——

GEORGE. Yes, Mother—I remember. [*Kisses her.*

MARQUISE [*to* GEORGE, *aside*]. We must take her abroad, and make a lady of her.

GEORGE. Can't, Mamma—she's ready-made. Nature has done it to our hands.

MARQUISE [*aside, to* GEORGE]. But I won't have the man who smells of putty [SAM *at back. He is listening, and at the word 'putty' throws his cap irritably on table.* POLLY *pacifies him, and makes him sit down beside her on window*], nor the man who smells of beer.

[*Goes to* ESTHER, *who offers her chair, and sits in chair opposite to her.*

[*Enter* HAWTREE, *pale.*

HAWTREE. George! Oh, the Marchioness is here.

GEORGE. What's the matter?

HAWTREE. Oh, nothing. Yes, there is. I don't mind telling you. I've been thrown. I called at my chambers as I came along and found this. [*Gives* GEORGE *a note; sits on music-stool.*

GEORGE. From the Countess, Lady Florence's mother. [*Reads.*] "Dear Major Hawtree,—I hasten to inform you that my daughter Florence is about to enter into an alliance with Lord Saxeby, the eldest son of the Marquis of Loamshire. Under these circumstances, should you think fit to call here again, I feel assured——" Well, perhaps it's for the best. [*Returning letter*] Caste! you know. Caste! And a marquis is a bigger swell than a major.

HAWTREE. Yes, best to marry in your own rank of life.

GEORGE. If you can find *the* girl. But if ever you find *the* girl, marry her. As to her station—

"True hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood."

HAWTREE. Ya-as. But a gentleman should hardly ally himself to a nobody.

GEORGE. My dear fella, Nobody's a mistake—he don't exist. Nobody's nobody! Everybody's somebody.

HAWTREE. Yes. But still—Caste.

GEORGE. Oh, Caste's all right. Caste is a good thing if it's not carried too far. It shuts the door on the pretentious and the vulgar; but it should open the door very wide for exceptional merit. Let brains break through its barriers, and what brains can break through love may leap over.

HAWTREE. Yes. Why George, you're quite inspired—quite an orator. What makes you so brilliant? Your captivity? The voyage? What, then?

GEORGE. I'm in love with my wife!

[*Enter* ECCLES, *drunk, a bottle of gin in his hand.*

ECCLES [*crossing to centre*]. Bless this 'appy company. May we 'ave in our arms what we love in our 'earts [*goes to head of table*]. Polly, fetch wine-glasses—a tumbler will do for me. Let us drink a toast. Mr Chairman [*to* MARQUISE], ladies, and gentlemen—I beg to propose the 'elth of our newly returned warrior, *my son-in-law.* [MARQUISE *shivers.*] The Right Honourable George De Alroy. Get glasses, Polly, and send for a bottle of sherry wine for my ladyship. *My* ladyship! My ladyship! M'lad'ship. [*She half turns to him.*] You and me'll have a dram together on the quiet. So delighted to see you under these altered circum—circum—circum—stangate.

[POLLY, *who has shaken her head at him to desist, in vain, very distressed.*

SAM. Shove 'is 'ead in a bucket! [*Exit, in disgust.*

HAWTREE [*aside to* GEORGE]. I think I can abate this nuisance—at least, I can remove it.

[*Rises and crosses to* ECCLES, *who has got round to right side of table, leaning on it. He taps* ECCLES *with his stick, first on right shoulder, then on left, and finally sharply on right.* ECCLES *turns round and falls on point of stick*—HAWTREE *steadying him.* GEORGE *crosses behind, to* MARQUISE, *who has gone to cradle—puts his arm round* ESTHER *and takes her to mantelpiece.*

HAWTREE. Mr Eccles, don't you think that, with your talent for liquor, if you had an allowance of about two pounds a week, and went to Jersey, where spirits are cheap, that you could drink yourself to death in a year?

ECCLES. I think I could—I'm sure I'll try.

[*Goes up left of table, steadying himself by it, and sits in chair by fire, with the bottle of gin.* HAWTREE *standing by fire.* ESTHER *and* POLLY *stand embracing, centre. As they turn away from each other—*

GEORGE [*coming across with* ESTHER]. Come and play me that air that used to ring in my ears as I lay awake, night after night, captive in the cave—you know. [*He hands* ESTHER *to piano. She plays the air.*

MARQUISE [*bending over the cradle, at end*]. My grandson!

[ECCLES *falls off the chair in the last stage of drunkenness, bottle in hand.* HAWTREE, *leaning one foot on chair from which* ECCLES *has fallen, looks at him through eyeglass.* SAM *enters, and goes to* POLLY, *behind cradle, and, producing wedding-ring from several papers, holds it up before her eyes.* ESTHER *plays until curtain drops.*

# TRELAWNY OF THE 'WELLS'

## By SIR ARTHUR WING PINERO

*First produced at the Court Theatre, London, January 20, 1898*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

*Theatrical Folk*

James Telfer
Mrs Telfer (Miss Violet Sylvester)
Augustus Colpoys
Ferdinand Gadd
Tom Wrench
Avonia Bunn
Rose Trelawny
*of the Bagnigge Wells Theatre*

Imogen Parrott, *of the Royal Olympic Theatre*
O'Dwyer, *Prompter at the Pantheon Theatre*
Members of the Company of the Pantheon Theatre
Hall-keeper at the Pantheon

*Non-theatrical Folk*

Vice-Chancellor Sir William Gower, Knt.
Miss Trafalgar Gower, *Sir William's sister*
Arthur Gower
Clara de Fœnix
*his grandchildren*
Captain de Fœnix, *Clara's husband*
Mrs Mossop
Mr Ablett
Charles
Sarah

The First Act. *Mr and Mrs Telfer's lodgings at No. 2 Brydon Crescent, Clerkenwell. May.*

The Second Act. *At Sir William Gower's, in Cavendish Square. June.*

The Third Act. *Again in Brydon Crescent. December.*

The Fourth Act. *On the stage of the Pantheon Theatre. A few days later.*

Period: *Somewhere in the early sixties.*

IN the year 1928 a one-act play by Sir Arthur Pinero was produced at the Little Theatre: in 1877 the first one-acter of A. W. Pinero was produced. It falls to few men to be fifty years a playwright. Pinero was an actor with Henry Irving before he wrote plays. His early pieces were farces or farcical comedies, and, of their kind, revolutionary. The farce of the eighties was commonly an adaptation from the French, as naughty as the Censor would permit —and he permitted a degree of raffishness surprising in a Victorian Censor, unless we remember that there were two kinds of theatres—viz., family theatres and those to which no young person ever went. Pinero's revolution (a sort of anti-French Revolution) substituted for such adaptations the robustly English farces of his first period—*The Magistrate*, *The Hobby Horse*, *Dandy Dick*, *Sweet Lavender* with its Thackerayan echoes, and *The Amazons*, which might be held, in the eyes of contemporary Wimbledon, to earn historic value by expressing, if farcically, the Late Victorian opinion about feminine athleticism.

Later on, either responsive to the influence of Ibsen or because of a spontaneous change of mood, Sir Arthur became *the* serious playwright of the nineties and afterward—until the Court Theatre season of 1904–7 showed that a new phase of British drama had triumphantly set in. *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* put on the playbills of the world the un-English name of its very English author to show that, much as the play owed in England to the acting of Mrs Patrick Campbell, it was nevertheless the author's, not the actress's, invention.

It is impossible to write here in detail of the body of Sir Arthur's work—of, to mention only those plays which seem most urgently to call for mention, *The Benefit of the Doubt*, *The Gay Lord Quex* (in which, in 1899, a lady's garter shocked), *Iris*, *Letty*, *His House in Order* (often instanced, together with Henry Becque's *Les Corbeaux*, as a model of play-construction), *Mid-Channel*, *The "Mind the Paint" Girl* (one of Sir Arthur's shrewdest social comments, recommended by Mr Bernard Shaw to students of sociology), and last, but far from least, *Trelawny of the 'Wells,'* in which Sir Arthur looked back upon the stage manners of the sixties, and made out of the early struggles of T. W. Robertson a timeless play, jejune in actual story, but grandly rich in characterization, which, ineluctably authentic, transcends the fable of the comedy.

Present fashions in conversation are slangy and terse. The dialogue of most of Sir Arthur Pinero's characters seems, to a modern ear, rotund —as if the speakers had been brought up in the offices of old-fashioned solicitors. They finished their sentences. It was a statelier age, of roomy four- or five-act plays, and of words to fill them. It is necessary to remember that Pinero's people were Victorians and Edwardians. The dialogue of *Trelawny* is deliberately 'period'; but the dialogue of *The Gay Lord Quex* has become 'period' by the mere passage of time.

# THE FIRST ACT

*The scene represents a sitting-room on the first floor of a respectable lodging-house. On the right are two sash-windows, having Venetian blinds and giving a view of houses on the other side of the street. The grate of the fireplace is hidden by an ornament composed of shavings and paper roses. Over the fireplace is a mirror: on each side there is a side-board-cupboard. On the left is a door, and a landing is seen outside. Between the windows stand a cottage piano and a piano-stool. Above the sofa, on the left, stands a large black trunk, the lid bulging with its contents and displaying some soiled theatrical finery. On the front of the trunk, in faded lettering, appear the words "Miss Violet Sylvester, Theatre Royal, Drury Lane." Under the sofa there are two or three pairs of ladies' satin shoes, much the worse for wear, and on the sofa a white satin bodice, yellow with age, a heap of dog-eared playbooks, and some other litter of a like character. On the top of the piano there is a wig-block, with a man's wig upon it, and in the corners of the room there stand some walking-sticks and a few theatrical swords. In the centre of the stage is a large circular table. There is a clean cover upon it, and on the top of the sideboard-cupboards are knives and forks, plate, glass, cruet-stands, and some gaudy flowers in vases—all suggesting preparations for festivity. The woodwork of the room is grained, the ceiling plainly whitewashed, and the wall-paper is of a neutral tint and much faded. The pictures are engravings in maple frames, and a portrait or two, in oil, framed in gilt. The furniture, curtains, and carpet are worn, but everything is clean and well kept.*

*The light is that of afternoon in early summer.*

Mrs Mossop—*a portly, middle-aged Jewish lady, elaborately attired—is laying the tablecloth.* Ablett *enters hastily, divesting himself of his coat as he does so. He is dressed in rusty black for 'waiting.'*

Mrs Mossop [*in a fluster*]. Oh, here you are, Mr Ablett——!

Ablett. Good day, Mrs Mossop.

The acting rights of this play are reserved. Applications regarding amateur performances should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

Note. *Bagnigge* (locally pronounced Bagnidge) *Wells*—the 'Wells' of the play—was formerly a popular mineral spring in Islington, London, situated not far from the better remembered Sadler's Wells. The gardens of Bagnigge Wells were at one time much resorted to; but, as a matter of fact, Bagnigge Wells, unlike Sadler's Wells, has never possessed a playhouse. Sadler's Wells Theatre, however—always familiarly known as the 'Wells'—still exists; or did till recently, for at the time of the passing of this volume through the press it has been demolished with a view to reconstruction. It was previously rebuilt in 1879.

Mrs Mossop [*bringing the cruet-stands*]. I declare I thought you'd forgotten me.

Ablett [*hanging his coat upon a curtain-knob, and turning up his shirt-sleeves*]. I'd begun to fear I should never escape from the shop, ma'am. Jest as I was preparin' to clean myself, the 'ole universe seemed to cry aloud for pertaters. [*Relieving* Mrs Mossop *of the cruet-stands, and satisfying himself as to the contents of the various bottles*] Now you take a seat, Mrs Mossop. You 'ave but to say, "Mr Ablett, lay for so many," and the exact number shall be laid for.

Mrs Mossop [*sinking into the armchair*]. I hope the affliction of short breath may be spared you, Ablett. Ten is the number.

Ablett [*whipping up the mustard energetically*]. Short-breathed you may be, ma'am, but not short-sighted. That gal of yours is no ordinary gal, but to 'ave set 'er to wait on ten persons would 'ave been to 'ave caught disaster. [*Bringing knives and forks, glass, etc., and glancing round the room as he does so*] I am in Mr and Mrs Telfer's setting-room, I believe, ma'am?

Mrs Mossop [*surveying the apartment complacently*]. And what a handsomely proportioned room it is, to be sure!

Ablett. May I h'ask if I am to 'ave the honour of includin' my triflin' fee for this job in their weekly book?

Mrs Mossop. No, Ablett—a separate bill, please. The Telfers kindly give the use of their apartment, to save the cost of holding the ceremony at the Clown Tavern; but share and share alike over the expenses is to be the order of the day.

Ablett. I thank you, ma'am. [*Rubbing up the knives with a napkin*] You let fall the word 'ceremony,' ma'am——

Mrs Mossop. Ah, Ablett, and a sad one—a farewell cold collation to Miss Trelawny.

Ablett. Lor' bless me! I 'eard a rumour——

Mrs Mossop. A true rumour. She's taking her leave of us, the dear.

Ablett. This will be a blow to the 'Wells,' ma'am.

Mrs Mossop. The best juvenile lady the 'Wells' has known since Mr Phillips's management.

Ablett. Report 'as it, a love affair, ma'am.

Mrs Mossop. A love affair, indeed. And a poem into the bargain, Ablett, if poet was at hand to write it.

Ablett. Reelly, Mrs Mossop! [*Polishing a tumbler*] Is the beer to be bottled or draught, ma'am, on this occasion?

Mrs Mossop. Draught for Miss Trelawny, invariably.

Ablett. Then draught it must be all round, out of compliment. Jest fancy! nevermore to 'ear customers speak of Trelawny of the 'Wells,' except as a pleasin' memory! A non-professional gentleman they give out, ma'am.

Mrs Mossop. Yes.

Ablett. Name of Glover.

Mrs Mossop. Gower. Grandson of Vice-Chancellor Sir William Gower, Mr Ablett.

Ablett. You don't say, ma'am!

Mrs Mossop. No father nor mother, and lives in Cavendish Square with the old judge and a great-aunt.

Ablett. Then Miss Trelawny quits the Profession, ma'am, for good and all, I presoom?

Mrs Mossop. Yes, Ablett, she's at the theaytre at this moment, distributing some of her little ornaments and fallals among the ballet. She played last night for the last time—the last time on any stage. [*Rising and going to the sideboard-cupboard*] And without so much as a line in the bill to announce it. What a benefit she might have taken!

Ablett. I know one who was good for two box tickets, Mrs Mossop.

Mrs Mossop [*bringing the flowers to the table and arranging them, while* Ablett *sets out the knives and forks*]. But no. "No fuss," said the Gower family, "no publicity. Withdraw quietly"—that was the Gower family's injunctions—"withdraw quietly, and have done with it."

Ablett. And when is the weddin' to be, ma'am?

Mrs Mossop. It's not yet decided, Mr Ablett. In point of fact, before the Gower family positively say yes to the union, Miss Trelawny is to make her home in Cavendish Square for a short term—"short term" is the Gower family's own expression—in order to habituate herself to the West End. They're sending their carriage for her at two o'clock this afternoon, Mr Ablett—their carriage and pair of bay horses.

Ablett. Well, I dessay a West End life has sooperior advantages over the Profession in some respecks, Mrs Mossop.

Mrs Mossop. When accompanied by wealth, Mr Ablett. Here's Miss Trelawny but nineteen, and in a month or two's time she'll be ordering about her own powdered footman, and playing on her grand piano. How many actresses do *that*, I should like to know!

[Tom Wrench's *voice is heard.*

Tom [*outside the door*]. Rebecca! Rebecca, my loved one!

Mrs Mossop. Oh, go along with you, Mr Wrench!

[Tom *enters, with a pair of scissors in his hand. He is a shabbily dressed, ungraceful man of about thirty, with a clean-shaven face, curly hair, and eyes full of good-humour.*

Tom. My own, especial Rebecca!

Mrs Mossop. Don't be a fool, Mr Wrench! Now, I've no time to waste. I know you want something——

Tom. Everything, adorable. But most desperately do I stand in need of a little skilful trimming at your fair hands.

MRS MOSSOP [*taking the scissors from him and clipping the frayed edges of his shirt-cuffs and collar*]. First it's patching a coat, and then it's binding an Inverness! Sometimes I wish that top room of mine was empty.

TOM. And sometimes I wish my heart was empty, cruel Rebecca.

MRS MOSSOP [*giving him a thump*]. Now, I really will tell Mossop of you, when he comes home! I've often threatened it——

TOM [*to* ABLETT]. Whom do I see! No—it can't be—but yes—I believe I have the privilege of addressing Mr Ablett, the eminent greengrocer, of Rosoman Street?

ABLETT [*sulkily*]. Well, Mr Wrench, and wot of it?

TOM. You possess a cart, good Ablett, which may be hired by persons of character and responsibility. "By the hour or job"—so runs the legend. I will charter it, one of these Sundays, for a drive to Epping.

ABLETT. I dunno so much about that, Mr Wrench.

TOM. Look to the springs, good Ablett, for this comely lady will be my companion.

MRS MOSSOP. Dooce take your impudence! Give me your other han'! Haven't you been to rehearsal this morning with the rest of 'em?

TOM. I have, and have left my companions still toiling. My share in the interpretation of Sheridan Knowles's immortal work did not necessitate my remaining after the first act.

MRS MOSSOP. Another poor part, I suppose, Mr Wrench?

TOM. Another, and to-morrow yet another, and on Saturday two others—all equally, damnably rotten.

MRS MOSSOP. Ah, well, well! *somebody* must play the bad parts in this world, on and off the stage. There, [*returning the scissors*] there's no more edge left to fray; we've come to the soft. [*He points the scissors at his breast.*] Ah! don't do that!

TOM. You are right, sweet Mossop, I won't perish on an empty stomach. [*Taking her aside*] But tell me, shall I disgrace the feast, eh? Is my appearance too scandalously seedy?

MRS MOSSOP. Not *it*, my dear.

TOM. Miss Trelawny—do you think she'll regard me as a blot on the banquet? [*Wistfully*] Do you, Beccy?

MRS MOSSOP. She! la! don't distress yourself. She'll be too excited to notice *you*.

TOM. H'm, yes! now I recollect, she has always been that. Thanks, Beccy.

[*A knock, at the front door, is heard.* MRS MOSSOP *hurries to the window down the stage.*

MRS MOSSOP. Who's that? [*Opening the window and looking out*] It's Miss Parrott! Miss Parrott's arrived!

TOM. Jenny Parrott? Has Jenny condescended——?

MRS MOSSOP. *Jenny!* Where are your manners, Mr Wrench?

TOM [*grandiloquently*]. Miss Imogen Parrott, of the Olympic Theatre.

MRS MOSSOP [*at the door, to* ABLETT]. Put your coat on, Ablett. We are not selling cabbages. [*She disappears and is heard speaking in the distance.*] Step up, Miss Parrott! Tell Miss Parrott to mind that mat, Sarah——!

TOM. Be quick, Ablett, be quick! The *élite* is below! More dispatch, good Ablett!

ABLETT [*to* TOM, *spitefully, while struggling into his coat*]. Miss Trelawny's leavin' will make all the difference to the old 'Wells.' The season'll terminate abrupt, and then the comp'ny'll be h'out, Mr Wrench —h'out, sir!

TOM [*adjusting his necktie at a mirror over the piano*]. Which will lighten the demand for the spongy turnip and the watery marrow, my poor Ablett.

ABLETT [*under his breath*]. Presumpshus! [*He produces a pair of white cotton gloves, and having put one on makes a horrifying discovery.*] Two lefts! That's Mrs Ablett all over!

[*During the rest of the act he is continually in difficulties through his efforts to wear one of the gloves upon his right hand.* MRS MOSSOP *now re-enters, with* IMOGEN PARROTT. IMOGEN *is a pretty, light-hearted young woman, of about seven-and-twenty, daintily dressed.*

MRS MOSSOP [*to* IMOGEN]. There, it might be only yesterday you lodged in my house, to see you gliding up those stairs! And this the very room you shared with poor Miss Brooker!

IMOGEN [*advancing to* TOM]. Well, Wrench, and how are you?

TOM [*bringing her a chair, demonstratively dusting the seat of it with his pocket-handkerchief*]. Thank you, much the same as when you used to call me Tom.

IMOGEN. Oh, but I have turned over a new leaf, you know, since I have been at the Olympic.

MRS MOSSOP. I am sure my chairs don't require dusting, Mr Wrench.

TOM [*placing the chair below the table, and blowing his nose with his handkerchief, with a flourish*]. My way of showing homage, Mossop.

MRS MOSSOP. Miss Parrott has sat on them often enough, when she was an honoured member of the 'Wells'—haven't you, Miss Parrott?

IMOGEN [*sitting, with playful dignity*]. I suppose I must have done so. Don't remind me of it. I sit on nothing nowadays but down pillows covered with cloth of gold.

[MRS MOSSOP *and* ABLETT *prepare to withdraw.*

MRS MOSSOP [*at the door, to* IMOGEN]. Ha, ha! ha! I could fancy I'm looking at Undine again—Undine, the Spirit of the Waters. She's not the least changed since she appeared as Undine—is she, Mr Ablett?

ABLETT [*joining* MRS MOSSOP]. No—or as Prince Cammyralzyman in the pantomime. *I* never 'ope to see a pair o' prettier limbs——

MRS MOSSOP [*sharply*]. Now, then!

[*She pushes him out; they disappear.*

IMOGEN [*after a shiver at* ABLETT'S *remark*]. In my present exalted station I don't hear much of what goes on at the 'Wells,' Wrench. Are your abilities still—still——?

TOM. Still unrecognized, still confined within the almost boundless and yet repressive limits of Utility—General Utility? [*Nodding*] H'm, still.

IMOGEN. Dear me! a thousand pities! I positively mean it.

TOM. Thanks.

IMOGEN. What do you think! You were mixed up in a funny dream I dreamt one night lately.

TOM [*bowing*]. Highly complimented.

IMOGEN. It was after a supper which rather—well, I'd had some strawberries sent me from Hertfordshire.

TOM. Indigestion levels all ranks.

IMOGEN. It was a nightmare. I found myself on the stage of the Olympic in that wig you—oh, gracious! You used to play your very serious little parts in it——

TOM. The wig with the ringlets?

IMOGEN. Ugh! yes.

TOM. I wear it to-night, for the second time this week, in a part which is very serious—and very little.

IMOGEN. Heavens! it *is* in existence, then!

TOM. And long will be, I hope. I've only three wigs, and this one accommodates itself to so many periods.

IMOGEN. Oh, how it used to amuse the gallery-boys!

TOM. They still enjoy it. If you looked in this evening at half-past seven—I'm done at a quarter to eight—if you looked in at half-past seven, you would hear the same glad, rapturous murmur in the gallery when the presence of that wig is discovered. Not that they fail to laugh at my other wigs, at every article of adornment I possess, in fact! Good God, Jenny——!

IMOGEN [*wincing*]. Ssssh!

TOM. Miss Parrott—if they gave up laughing at me now, I believe I'll—I believe I should—*miss it.* I believe I couldn't spout my few lines now in silence; my unaccompanied voice would sound so strange to me. Besides, I often think those gallery-boys are really fond of me, at heart. You can't laugh as they do—rock with laughter sometimes!—at what you dislike.

IMOGEN. Of course not. *Of course* they like you, Wrench. You cheer them, make their lives happier——

TOM. And to-night, by the bye, I also assume that beast of a felt hat —the gray hat with the broad brim, and the imitation wool feathers. You remember it?

IMOGEN. Y-y-yes.

TOM. I see you do. Well, that hat still persists in falling off when I most wish it to stick on. It will tilt and tumble to-night—during one of Telfer's pet speeches; I feel it will.

IMOGEN. Ha, ha, ha!

TOM. And those yellow boots; I wear *them* to-night——

IMOGEN. No!

TOM. Yes!

IMOGEN. Ho, ho, ho, ho!

TOM [*with forced hilarity*]. Ho, ho! ha, ha! And the spurs—the spurs that once tore your satin petticoat! You recollect——?

IMOGEN [*her mirth suddenly checked*]. Recollect!

TOM. You would see those spurs to-night too, if you patronized us —*and* the red worsted tights. The worsted tights are a little thinner, a little more faded and discoloured, a little more darned—— Oh, yes, thank you, I am still, as you put it, still—still—still——

[*He walks away, going to the mantelpiece and turning his back upon her.*

IMOGEN [*after a brief pause*]. I'm sure I didn't intend to hurt your feelings, Wrench.

TOM [*turning, with some violence*]. You! you hurt my feelings! Nobody can hurt my feelings! I have no feelings——!

[ABLETT *re-enters, carrying three chairs of odd patterns.* TOM *seizes the chairs and places them about the table, noisily.*

ABLETT. Look here, Mr Wrench! If I'm to be 'ampered in perrmin' my dooties——

TOM. More chairs, Ablett! In my apartment, the chamber nearest heaven, you will find one with a loose leg. We will seat Mrs Telfer on that. She dislikes me, and she is, in every sense, a heavy woman.

ABLETT [*moving toward the door—dropping his glove*]. My opinion, you 're meanin' to 'arass me, Mr Wrench——

TOM [*picking up the glove and throwing it to* ABLETT—*singing*]. "Take back thy glove, thou faithless fair!" Your glove, Ablett.

ABLETT. Thank you, sir; it *is* my glove, and you are no gentleman.

[*He withdraws.*

TOM. True, Ablett—not even a Walking Gentleman.

IMOGEN. Don't go on so, Wrench. What about your plays? Aren't you trying to write any plays just now?

TOM. Trying! I am doing more than trying to write plays. I am writing plays. I have written plays.

IMOGEN. Well?

TOM. My cupboard upstairs is choked with 'em.

IMOGEN. Won't anyone take a fancy——?

TOM. Not a sufficiently violent fancy.

IMOGEN. You know, the speeches were so short and had such ordinary words in them, in the plays you used to read to me—no big opportunity for the leading lady, Wrench.

TOM. M'yes. I strive to make my people talk and behave like live people, don't I——?

IMOGEN [*vaguely*]. I suppose you do.

TOM. To fashion heroes out of actual, dull, everyday men—the sort of men you see smoking cheroots in the club windows in St James's Street; and heroines from simple maidens in muslin frocks. Naturally, the managers won't stand that.

IMOGEN. Why, of course not.

TOM. If *they* did, the public wouldn't.

IMOGEN. Is it likely?

TOM. Is it likely? I wonder!

IMOGEN. Wonder—what?

TOM. Whether they would.

IMOGEN. The public!

TOM. The public. Jenny, I wonder about it sometimes so hard that that little bedroom of mine becomes a banqueting-hall, and this lodging-house a castle. [*There is a loud and prolonged knocking at the front door.*

IMOGEN. Here they are, I suppose.

TOM [*pulling himself together*]. Good Lord! have I become dishevelled?

IMOGEN. Why, are you anxious to make an impression, even down to the last, Wrench?

TOM [*angrily*]. Stop that!

IMOGEN. It's no good your being sweet on her any longer, surely?

TOM [*glaring at her*]. What cats you all are, you girls!

IMOGEN [*holding up her hands*]. Oh! oh, dear! How vulgar—after the Olympic! [ABLETT *returns, carrying three more chairs.*

ABLETT [*arranging these chairs on the left of the table*]. They're all 'ome! they're all 'ome! [TOM *places the four chairs belonging to the room at the table. To* IMOGEN] She looks 'eavenly, Miss Trelawny does. I was jest takin' in the ale when she floated down the Crescent on her lover's arm. [*Wagging his head at* IMOGEN *admiringly*] There, I don't know which of you two is the——

IMOGEN [*haughtily*]. Man, keep your place!

ABLETT [*hurt*]. H'as you please, miss—but you apparently forget I used to serve you with vegetables.

[*He takes up a position at the door as* TELFER *and* GADD *enter.*

TELFER *is a thickset, elderly man, with a worn, clean-shaven*

*face, and iron-gray hair 'clubbed' in the theatrical fashion of the time. Sonorous, if somewhat husky, in speech, and elaborately dignified in bearing, he is at the same time a little uncertain about his h's.* GADD *is a flashily dressed young man of seven-and-twenty, with brown hair arranged à la Byron and moustache of a deeper tone.*

TELFER [*advancing to* IMOGEN, *and kissing her paternally*]. Ha, my ear child! I heard you were 'ere. Kind of you to visit us. Welcome! I'll just put my 'at down——

[*He places his hat on the top of the piano, and proceeds to inspect the table.*

GADD [*coming to* IMOGEN, *in an elegant, languishing way*]. Imogen, ly darling. [*Kissing her*] Kiss Ferdy!

IMOGEN. Well, Gadd, how goes it—I mean, how are you?

GADD [*earnestly*]. I'm hitting them hard this season, my darling. o-night, Sir Thomas Clifford. They're simply waiting for my lifford.

IMOGEN. But who on earth is your Julia?

GADD. Ha! Mrs Telfer *goes on* for it—a venerable stop-gap. Absurd, course; but we daren't keep my Clifford from them any longer.

IMOGEN. You'll miss Rose Trelawny in business pretty badly, I pect, Gadd?

GADD [*with a shrug of the shoulders*]. She was to have done Rosalind r my benefit. Miss Fitzhugh joins on Monday; I must pull *her* rough it somehow. I would reconsider my bill, but they're waiting for y Orlando, waiting for it——

[COLPOYS *enters—an insignificant, wizen little fellow who is unable to forget that he is a low-comedian. He stands at the door squinting hideously at* IMOGEN *and indulging in extravagant gestures of endearment, while she continues her conversation with* GADD.

COLPOYS [*failing to attract her attention*]. My love! my life!

IMOGEN [*nodding to him indifferently*]. Good afternoon, Augustus.

COLPOYS [*ridiculously*]. She speaks! she hears me!

ABLETT [*holding his glove before his mouth, convulsed with laughter*]. , ho! oh, Mr Colpoys! oh, reelly, sir! ho, dear!

GADD [*to* IMOGEN, *darkly*]. Colpoys is not nearly as funny as he s last year. Everybody's saying so. We want a low-comedian lly.

[*He retires, deposits his hat on the wig-block, and joins* TELFER *and* TOM.

COLPOYS [*staggering to* IMOGEN *and throwing his arms about her neck*]. —h—h! after all these years!

MOGEN [*pushing him away*]. Do be careful of my things, Colpoys.

ABLETT [*going out, blind with mirth*]. Ha, ha, ha! ho, ho!

[*He collides with* MRS TELFER, *who is entering at this moment.* MRS TELFER *is a tall, massive lady of middle age—a faded queen of tragedy.*

ABLETT [*as he disappears*]. I'm sure I beg your pardon, Mrs Telfer, ma'am.

MRS TELFER. Violent fellow! [*Advancing to* IMOGEN *and kissing her solemnly*] How is it with you, Jenny Parrott?

IMOGEN. Thank you, Mrs Telfer, as well as can be. And you?

MRS TELFER [*waving away the inquiry*]. I am obliged to you for this response to my invitation. It struck me as fitting that at such a time you should return for a brief hour or two to the company of your old associates—— [*Becoming conscious of* COLPOYS, *behind her, making grimaces at* IMOGEN] Eh—h—h? [*Turning to* COLPOYS *and surprising him*] Oh—h—h! Yes, Augustus Colpoys, you are extremely humorous *off*.

COLPOYS [*stung*]. Miss Sylvester—Mrs Telfer!

MRS TELFER. *On* the stage, sir, you are enough to make a cat weep.

COLPOYS. Madam! from one artist to another! well, I——! 'Pon my soul! [*Retreating and talking under his breath*] Popular favourite! draw more money than all the—old guys——

MRS TELFER [*following him*]. What do you say, sir? Do you mutter?

[*They explain mutually.* AVONIA BUNN *enters—an untidy, tawdrily dressed young woman of about three-and-twenty, with the airs of a suburban soubrette.*

AVONIA [*embracing* IMOGEN]. Dear old girl!

IMOGEN. Well, Avonia?

AVONIA. This is jolly, seeing you again. My eye, what a rig-out! She'll be up directly. [*With a gulp*] She's taking a last look round at our room.

IMOGEN. You've been crying, 'Vonia.

AVONIA. No, I haven't. [*Breaking down*] If I have I can't help it. Rose and I have chummed together—all this season—and part of last—and—it's a hateful profession! The moment you make a friend——! [*Looking toward the door*] There! isn't she a dream? I dressed her——

[*She moves away, as* ROSE TRELAWNY *and* ARTHUR GOWER *enter.* ROSE *is nineteen, wears washed muslin, and looks divine. She has much of the extravagance of gesture, over-emphasis in speech, and freedom of manner engendered by the theatre, but is graceful and charming nevertheless.* ARTHUR *is a handsome, boyish young man—'all eyes' for* ROSE.

ROSE [*meeting* IMOGEN]. Dear Imogen!

IMOGEN [*kissing her*]. Rose, dear!

ROSE. To think of your journeying from the West to see me make my exit from Brydon Crescent! But you're a good sort; you always were. Do sit down and tell me—oh——! Let me introduce Mr Gower. Mr Arthur Gower—Miss Imogen Parrott. *The* Miss Parrott of the Olympic.

ARTHUR [*reverentially*]. I know. I've seen Miss Parrott as Jupiter, and as—I forget the name—in the new comedy——

[IMOGEN *and* ROSE *sit, below the table.*

ROSE. He forgets everything but the parts *I* play, and the pieces *I* play in—poor child! don't you, Arthur?

ARTHUR [*standing by* ROSE, *looking down upon her*]. Yes—no. Well, of course I do! How can I help it, Miss Parrott? Miss Parrott won't think the worse of me for that—will you, Miss Parrott?

MRS TELFER. I am going to remove my bonnet. Imogen Parrott——?

IMOGEN. Thank you, I'll keep my hat on, Mrs Telfer—take care!

[MRS TELFER, *in turning to go, encounters* ABLETT, *who is entering with two jugs of beer. Some of the beer is spilt.*

ABLETT. I beg your pardon, ma'am.

MRS TELFER [*examining her skirts*]. Ruffian! [*She departs.*

ROSE [*to* ARTHUR]. Go and talk to the boys. I haven't seen Miss Parrott for ages.

[*In backing away from them,* ARTHUR *comes against* ABLETT.

ABLETT. I beg your pardon, sir.

ARTHUR. I beg yours.

ABLETT [*grasping* ARTHUR's *hand*]. Excuse the freedom, sir, if freedom you regard it as——

ARTHUR. Eh——?

ABLETT. You 'ave plucked the flower, sir; you 'ave stole our ch'icest blossom.

ARTHUR [*trying to get away*]. Yes, yes, I know——

ABLETT. Cherish it, Mr Glover——!

ARTHUR. I will, I will. Thank you——

[MRS MOSSOP's *voice is heard calling "Ablett!"* ABLETT *releases* ARTHUR *and goes out.* ARTHUR *joins* COLPOYS *and* TOM.

ROSE [*to* IMOGEN]. The carriage will be here in half an hour. I've so much to say to you. Imogen, the brilliant hits you've made! how lucky you have been!

IMOGEN. *My* luck! what about *yours*?

ROSE. Yes, isn't this a wonderful stroke of fortune for me! Fate, Jenny! that's what it is—Fate! Fate ordains that I shall be a well-to-do fashionable lady, instead of a popular but toiling actress. Mother often used to stare into my face, when I was little, and whisper,

"Rosie, I wonder what is to be your—fate." Poor Mother! I hope she *sees*.

IMOGEN. Your Arthur seems nice.

ROSE. Oh, he's a dear. Very young, of course—not much more than a year older than me—than I. But he'll grow manly in time, and have moustaches, and whiskers out to here, he says.

IMOGEN. How did you——?

ROSE. He saw me act Blanche in *The Pedlar of Marseilles*, and fell in love.

IMOGEN. Do you prefer Blanche——?

ROSE. To Celestine? Oh, yes. You see, I got leave to introduce a song—where Blanche is waiting for Raphael on the bridge. [*Singing, dramatically but in low tones*] "Ever of thee I'm fondly dreaming——"

IMOGEN. I know—— [*They sing together.*

ROSE *and* IMOGEN. "Thy gentle voice my spirit can cheer."

ROSE. It was singing that song that sealed my destiny, Arthur declares. At any rate, the next thing was he began sending bouquets and coming to the stage-door. Of course, I never spoke to him, never glanced at him. Poor Mother brought me up in that way, not to speak to anybody, nor look.

IMOGEN. Quite right.

ROSE. I do hope she sees.

IMOGEN. And then——?

ROSE. Then Arthur managed to get acquainted with the Telfers, and Mrs Telfer presented him to me. Mrs Telfer has kept an eye on me all through. Not that it was necessary, brought up as I was—but she's a kind old soul.

IMOGEN. And now you're going to live with his people for a time, aren't you?

ROSE. Yes—on approval.

IMOGEN. Ha, ha, ha! you don't mean that!

ROSE. Well, in a way—just to reassure them, as they put it. The Gowers have such odd ideas about theatres, and actors and actresses.

IMOGEN. Do you think you'll like the arrangement?

ROSE. It'll only be for a little while. I fancy they're prepared to take to me, especially Miss Trafalgar Gower——

IMOGEN. Trafalgar!

ROSE. Sir William's sister; she was born Trafalgar year, and christened after it——

[MRS MOSSOP *and* ABLETT *enter, carrying trays on which are a pile of plates and various dishes of cold food—a joint, a chicken and a tongue, a ham, a pigeon pie, etc. They proceed to set out the dishes upon the table.*

IMOGEN [*cheerfully*]. Well, God bless you, my dear. I'm afraid *I* couldn't give up the stage, though, not for all the Arthurs——

ROSE. Ah, your mother wasn't an actress.

IMOGEN. No.

ROSE. Mine was, and I remember her saying to me once, "Rose, if ever you have the chance, get out of it."

IMOGEN. The Profession?

ROSE. Yes. "Get out of it"; Mother said, "If ever a good man comes along, and offers to marry you and to take you off the stage, seize the chance—get out of it."

IMOGEN. Your mother was never popular, was she?

ROSE. Yes, indeed she was, most popular—till she grew oldish and lost her looks.

IMOGEN. Oh, *that's* what she meant, then?

ROSE. Yes, that's what she meant.

IMOGEN [*shivering*]. Oh, Lor', doesn't it make one feel depressed!

ROSE. Poor Mother! Well, I hope she sees.

MRS MOSSOP. Now, ladies and gentlemen, everything is prepared, and I do trust to your pleasure and satisfaction.

TELFER. Ladies and gentlemen, I beg you to be seated. [*There is a general movement.*] Miss Trelawny will sit 'ere, on my right. On my left, my friend Mr Gower will sit. Next to Miss Trelawny—who will sit beside Miss Trelawny?

GADD *and* COLPOYS. I will.

AVONIA. No, do let me!

[GADD, COLPOYS, *and* AVONIA *gather round* ROSE *and wrangle for the vacant place.*

ROSE [*standing by her chair*]. It must be a gentleman, 'Vonia. Now, if you two boys quarrel——!

GADD. Please don't push me, Colpoys!

COLPOYS. 'Pon my soul, Gadd——!

ROSE. I know how to settle it. Tom Wrench——!

TOM [*coming to her*]. Yes?

[COLPOYS *and* GADD *move away, arguing.*

IMOGEN [*seating herself*]. Mr Gadd and Mr Colpoys shall sit by me, one on each side.

[COLPOYS *sits on* IMOGEN'S *right,* GADD *on her left;* AVONIA *sits between* TOM *and* GADD; MRS MOSSOP *on the right of* COLPOYS. *Amid much chatter, the viands are carved by* MRS MOSSOP, TELFER, *and* TOM. *Some plates of chicken, etc., are handed round by* ABLETT, *while others are passed about by those at the table.*

GADD [*quietly to* IMOGEN, *during a pause in the hubbub*]. Telfer takes the chair, you observe. Why *he*—more than myself, for instance?

IMOGEN [*to* GADD]. The Telfers have lent their room——

GADD. Their stuffy room! that's no excuse. I repeat, Telfer has thrust himself into this position.

IMOGEN. He's the oldest man present.

GADD. True. And he begins to age in his acting too. His *h*'s! scarce as pearls!

IMOGEN. Yes, that's shocking. Now, at the Olympic, slip an *h* and you're damned for ever.

GADD. And he's losing all his teeth. To act with him, it makes the house seem half empty.

[ABLETT *is now going about pouring out the ale. Occasionally he drops his glove, misses it, and recovers it.*

TELFER [*to* IMOGEN]. Miss Parrott, my dear, follow the counsel of one who has sat at many a "good man's feast"—have a little 'am.

IMOGEN. Thanks, Mr Telfer. [MRS TELFER *returns.*

MRS TELFER. Sitting down to table in my absence! [*To* TELFER] How is this, James?

TELFER. We are pressed for time, Violet, my love.

ROSE. Very sorry, Mrs Telfer.

MRS TELFER [*taking her place between* ARTHUR *and* MRS MOSSOP—*gloomily*]. A strange proceeding.

ROSE. Rehearsal was over so late. [*To* TELFER] You didn't get to the last act till a quarter to one, did you?

AVONIA [*taking off her hat and flinging it across the table to* COLPOYS]. Gus! catch! Put it on the sofa, there's a dear boy. [COLPOYS *perches the hat upon his head, and behaves in a ridiculous, mincing way.* ABLETT *is again convulsed with laughter. Some of the others are amused also, but more moderately.*] Take that off, Gus! Mr Colpoys, you just take my hat off!

[COLPOYS *rises, imitating the manners of a woman, and deposits the hat on the sofa.*

ABLETT. Ho, ho, ho! Oh, don't, Mr Colpoys! Oh, don't, sir!

[COLPOYS *returns to the table.*

GADD [*quietly to* IMOGEN]. It makes me sick to watch Colpoys in private life. He'd stand on his head in the street, if he could get a ragged infant to laugh at him. [*Picking the leg of a fowl furiously*] What I say is this. Why can't an actor, in private life, be simply a gentleman? [*Loudly and haughtily*] More tongue here!

ABLETT [*hurrying to him*]. Yessir, certainly, sir. [*Again discomposed by some antic on the part of* COLPOYS] Oh, don't, Mr Colpoys! [*Going to* TELFER *with* GADD's *plate—speaking while* TELFER *carves a slice of tongue*] I shan't easily forget this afternoon, Mr Telfer. [*Exhausted.*] This'll be something to tell Mrs Ablett. Ho, ho! oh, dear! oh, dear!

[ABLETT, *averting his face from* COLPOYS, *brings back* GADD's *plate. By an unfortunate chance* ABLETT's *glove has found its way to the plate and is handed to* GADD *by* ABLETT.

GADD [*picking up the glove in disgust*]. Merciful powers! what's this?

ABLETT [*taking the glove*]. I beg your pardon, sir—my error, entirely.

[*A firm rat-tat-tat at the front door is heard. There is a general exclamation. At the same moment* SARAH, *a diminutive servant in a crinoline, appears in the doorway.*

SARAH [*breathlessly*]. The kerridge has just drove up!

[IMOGEN, GADD, COLPOYS, *and* AVONIA *go to the windows, open them, and look out.* MRS MOSSOP *hurries away, pushing* SARAH *before her.*

TELFER. Dear me, dear me! before a single speech has been made.

AVONIA [*at the window*]. Rose, do look!

IMOGEN [*at the other window*]. Come here, Rose!

ROSE [*shaking her head*]. Ha, ha! I'm in no hurry; I shall see it often enough. [*Turning to* TOM] Well, the time has arrived. [*Laying down her knife and fork*] Oh, I'm so sorry, now.

TOM [*brusquely*]. Are you? I'm glad.

ROSE. Glad! that *is* hateful of you, Tom Wrench!

ARTHUR [*looking at his watch*]. The carriage is certainly two or three minutes before its time, Mr Telfer.

TELFER. Two or three——! The speeches, my dear sir, the speeches!

[MRS MOSSOP *returns, panting.*

MRS MOSSOP. The footman, a nice-looking young man with hazel eyes, says the carriage and pair can wait for a little bit. They must be back by three, to take their lady into the Park——

TELFER [*rising*]. Ahem! Resume your seats, I beg. Ladies and gentlemen——

AVONIA. Wait, wait! we're not ready!

[IMOGEN, GADD, COLPOYS, *and* AVONIA *return to their places.* MRS MOSSOP *also sits again.* ABLETT *stands by the door.*

TELFER [*producing a paper from his breast-pocket*]. Ladies and gentlemen, I devoted some time this morning to the preparation of a list of toasts. I now 'old that list in my hand. The first toast——

[*He pauses, to assume a pair of spectacles.*

GADD [*to* IMOGEN]. *He* arranges the toast-list! *he!*

IMOGEN [*to* GADD]. Hush!

TELFER. The first toast that figures 'ere is, naturally, that of The Queen. [*Laying his hand on* ARTHUR's *shoulder*] With my young friend's chariot at the door, his horses pawing restlessly and fretfully upon the stones, I am prevented from enlarging, from expatiating, upon the merits of this toast. Suffice it, both Mrs Telfer and I have had the honour of acting before Her Majesty upon no less than two occasions.

GADD [*to* IMOGEN]. Tsch, tsch, tsch! An old story!

TELFER. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you—[*to* COLPOYS]—the malt is with you, Mr Colpoys.

COLPOYS [*handing the ale to* TELFER]. Here you are, Telfer.

TELFER [*filling his glass*]. I give you The Queen, coupling with that toast the name of Miss Violet Sylvester—Mrs Telfer—formerly, as you are aware, of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Miss Sylvester has so frequently and, if I may say so, so nobly impersonated the various queens of tragedy that I cannot but feel she is a fitting person to acknowledge our expression of loyalty. [*Raising his glass*] The Queen! And Miss Violet Sylvester!

[*All rise, except* MRS TELFER, *and drink the toast. After drinking* MRS MOSSOP *passes her tumbler to* ABLETT.

ABLETT. The Queen! Miss Vi'lent Sylvester!

[*He drinks and returns the glass to* MRS MOSSOP. *The company being reseated,* MRS TELFER *rises. Her reception is a polite one.*

MRS TELFER [*heavily*]. Ladies and gentlemen, I have played fourteen or fifteen queens in my time——

TELFER. Thirteen, my love, to be exact; I was calculating this morning.

MRS TELFER. Very well, I have played thirteen of 'em. And, as parts, they are not worth a tinker's oath. I thank you for the favour with which you have received me.

[*She sits; the applause is heartier. During the demonstration* SARAH *appears in the doorway, with a kitchen chair.*

ABLETT [*to* SARAH]. Wot's all this?

SARAH [*to* ABLETT]. Is the speeches on?

ABLETT. H'on! yes, and you be h'off!

[*She places the chair against the open door and sits, full of determination. At intervals* ABLETT *vainly represents to her the impropriety of her proceeding.*

TELFER [*again rising*]. Ladies and gentlemen. Bumpers, I charge ye! The toast I 'ad next intended to propose was Our Immortal Bard, Shakespeare, and I had meant, myself, to 'ave offered a few remarks in response——

GADD [*to* IMOGEN, *bitterly*]. Ha!

TELFER. But with our friend's horses champing their bits, I am compelled—nay, forced—to postpone this toast to a later period of the day, and to give you now what we may justly designate the toast of the afternoon. Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to lose, to part with, one of our companions, a young comrade who came amongst us many months ago, who in fact joined the company of the 'Wells' last February twelve-month, after a considerable experience in the provinces of this great country.

COLPOYS. Hear, hear!

AVONIA [*tearfully*]. Hear, hear! [*With a sob*] I detested her at first.

COLPOYS. Order!

IMOGEN. Be quiet, 'Vonia!

TELFER. Her late mother an actress, herself made familiar with the stage from childhood if not from infancy, Miss Rose Trelawny—for I will no longer conceal from you that it is to Miss Trelawny I refer—— [*Loud applause.*] Miss Trelawny is the stuff of which great actresses are made.

ALL. Hear, hear!

ABLETT [*softly*]. 'Ear, 'ear!

TELFER. So much for the actress. Now for the young lady—nay, the woman, the gyirl. Rose is a good girl—— [*Loud applause, to which* ABLETT *and* SARAH *contribute largely.* AVONIA *rises and impulsively embraces* ROSE. *She is recalled to her seat by a general remonstrance.*] A good girl——

MRS TELFER [*clutching a knife*]. Yes, and I should like to hear anybody, man or woman——!

TELFER. She is a good girl, and will be long remembered by us as much for her private virtues as for the commanding authority of her genius. [*More applause, during which there is a sharp altercation between* ABLETT *and* SARAH.] And now, what has happened to "the expectancy and Rose of the fair state"?

IMOGEN. Good, Telfer! good!

GADD [*to* IMOGEN]. Tsch, tsch! forced! forced!

TELFER I will tell you—[*impressively*]—a man has crossed her path.

ABLETT [*in a low voice*]. Shame!

MRS MOSSOP [*turning to him*]. Mr Ablett!

TELFER. A man—ah, but also a gentle-man. [*Applause.*] A gentleman of probity, a gentleman of honour, and a gentleman of wealth and station. That gentleman, with the modesty of youth—for I may tell you at once that 'e is not an old man—comes to us and asks us to give him this gyirl to wife. And, friends, we have done so. A few preliminaries 'ave, I believe, still to be concluded between Mr Gower and his family, and then the bond will be signed, the compact entered upon, the mutual trust accepted. Riches this youthful pair will possess—but what is gold? May they be rich in each other's society, in each other's love! May they—I can wish them no greater joy—be as happy in their married life as my—my—as Miss Sylvester and I 'ave been in ours! [*Raising his glass*] Miss Rose Trelawny—Mr Arthur Gower! [*The toast is drunk by the company, upstanding. Three cheers are called for by* COLPOYS, *and given. Those who have risen then sit.*] Miss Trelawny.

ROSE [*weeping*]. No, no, Mr Telfer.

MRS TELFER [*to* TELFER, *softly*]. Let her be for a minute, James.

TELFER. Mr Gower. [ARTHUR *rises and is well received*

ARTHUR. Ladies and gentlemen, I—I would I were endowed with Mr Telfer's flow of—of—of splendid eloquence. But I am no orator, no speaker, and therefore cannot tell you how highly—how deeply I appreciate the—the compliment——

ABLETT. You deserve it, Mr Glover.

MRS MOSSOP. Hush!

ARTHUR. All I can say is that I regard Miss Trelawny in the light of a—a solemn charge, and I—I trust that if ever I have the pleasure of—of meeting any of you again, I shall be able to render a good—a—a—satisfactory—satisfactory——

TOM [*in an audible whisper*]. Account.

ARTHUR. Account of the way—of the way—in which I—in which—— [*Loud applause.*] Before I bring these observations to a conclusion, let me assure you that it has been a great privilege to me to meet—to have been thrown with—a band of artists—whose talents—whose striking talents—whose talents——

TOM [*kindly, behind his hand*]. Sit down.

ARTHUR [*helplessly*]. Whose talents not only interest and instruct the —the more refined residents of this district, but whose talents——

IMOGEN [*quietly to* COLPOYS]. Get him to sit down.

ARTHUR. The fame of whose talents, I should say——

COLPOYS [*quietly to* MRS MOSSOP]. He's to sit down. Tell Mother Telfer.

ARTHUR. The fame of whose talents has spread to—to regions——

MRS MOSSOP [*quietly to* MRS TELFER]. They say he's to sit down.

ARTHUR. To—to quarters of the town—to quarters——

MRS TELFER [*to* ARTHUR]. Sit down!

ARTHUR. Eh?

MRS TELFER. You finished long ago. Sit down.

ARTHUR. Thank you. I'm exceedingly sorry. Great heavens, how wretchedly I've done it!

[*He sits, burying his head in his hands. More applause.*

TELFER. Rose, my child.

[ROSE *starts to her feet. The rest rise with her, and cheer again, and wave handkerchiefs. She goes from one to the other, round the table, embracing and kissing and crying over them all excitedly.* SARAH *is kissed, but upon* ABLETT *is bestowed only a handshake, to his evident dissatisfaction.* IMOGEN *runs to the piano and strikes up the air of "Ever of Thee." When* ROSE *gets back to the place she mounts her chair, with the aid of* TOM *and* TELFER, *and faces them with flashing eyes. They pull the flowers out of the vases and throw them at her.*

ROSE. Mr Telfer, Mrs Telfer! My friends! Boys! Ladies and

gentlemen! No, don't stop, Jenny! go on! [*Singing, her arms stretched out to them*] "Ever of thee I'm fondly dreaming, Thy gentle voice——" You remember! the song I sang in *The Pedlar of Marseilles* —which made Arthur fall in love with me! Well, I know I shall dream of *you*, of all of you, very often, as the song says. Don't believe [*wiping away her tears*], oh, don't believe that, because I shall have married a swell, you and the old 'Wells'—the dear old 'Wells'——! [*Cheers.*] You and the old 'Wells' will have become nothing to me! No, many and many a night you will see me in the house, looking down at you from the Circle—me and my husband——

ARTHUR. Yes, yes, certainly!

ROSE. And if you send for me I'll come behind the curtain to you, and sit with you and talk of bygone times, these times that end to-day. And shall I tell you the moments which will be the happiest to me in my life, however happy I may be with Arthur? Why, whenever I find that I am recognized by people, and pointed out—people in the pit of a theatre, in the street, no matter where; and when I can fancy they're saying to each other, "Look! that was Miss Trelawny! you remember —Trelawny! Trelawny of the 'Wells'——!"

[*They cry "Trelawny!" and "Trelawny of the 'Wells!'" and again "Trelawny!" wildly. Then there is the sound of a sharp rat-tat at the front door.* IMOGEN *leaves the piano and looks out of the window.*

IMOGEN [*to somebody below*]. What is it?

A VOICE. Miss Trelawny, ma'am. We can't wait.

ROSE [*weakly*]. Oh, help me down——

[*They assist her, and gather round her finally, bidding her farewell.*

# THE SECOND ACT

*The scene represents a spacious drawing-room in a house in Cavendish Square. The walls are sombre in tone, the ceiling dingy, the hangings, though rich, are faded, and altogether the appearance of the room is solemn, formal, and depressing. On the right are folding-doors admitting to a further drawing-room. Beyond these is a single door. The wall on the left is mainly occupied by three sash-windows. The wall facing the spectators is divided by two pilasters into three panels. On the centre panel is a large mirror, reflecting the fireplace; on the right hangs a large oil painting—a portrait of Sir William Gower in his judicial wig and robes. On the left hangs a companion picture—a portrait of Miss Gower. In the corners of the room there are marble columns supporting classical busts, and between the doors stands another marble column, upon which is an oil lamp. Against the lower window there are two chairs and a card-table. Behind a further table supporting a lamp stands a threefold screen.*

*The lamps are lighted, but the curtains are not drawn, and outside the windows it is twilight.*

Sir William Gower *is seated, near a table, asleep, with a newspaper over his head, concealing his face.* Miss Trafalgar Gower *is sitting at the further end of a couch, also asleep, and with a newspaper over her head. At the lower end of this couch sits* Mrs de Fœnix—Clara—*a young lady of nineteen, with a 'married' air. She is engaged upon some crochet-work. On the other side of the room, near a table,* Rose *is seated, wearing the look of a boredom which has reached the stony stage. On another couch* Arthur *sits, gazing at his boots, his hands in his pockets. On the right of this couch stands* Captain de Fœnix, *leaning against the wall, his mouth open, his head thrown back, and his eyes closed.* De Fœnix *is a young man of seven-and-twenty—an example of the heavily whiskered 'swell' of the period. Everybody is in dinner-dress. After a moment or two* Arthur *rises and tiptoes down to* Rose. Clara *raises a warning finger and says "Hush!" He nods to her, in assent.*

Arthur [*on* Rose's *left—in a whisper*]. Quiet, isn't it?

Rose [*to him, in a whisper*]. Quiet! Arthur——! [*Clutching his arm*] Oh, this dreadful half-hour after dinner, every, *every* evening!

Arthur [*creeping across to the right of the table and sitting there*]. Grandfather and Aunt Trafalgar must wake up soon. They're longer than usual to-night.

ROSE [*to him, across the table*]. Your sister Clara, over there, and Captain de Fœnix—when they were courting, did they have to go through this?

ARTHUR. Yes.

ROSE. And now that they are married, they still endure it!

ARTHUR. Yes.

ROSE. And we, when *we* are married, Arthur, shall *we*——?

ARTHUR. Yes. I suppose so.

ROSE [*passing her hand across her brow*]. Phe—ew!

[DE FŒNIX, *fast asleep, is now swaying, and in danger of toppling over.* CLARA *grasps the situation and rises.*

CLARA [*in a guttural whisper*]. Ah, Frederick! no, no, no!

ROSE *and* ARTHUR [*turning in their chairs*]. Eh—what——? ah—h—h—h!

[*As* CLARA *reaches her husband, he lurches forward into her arms.*

DE FŒNIX [*his eyes bolting*]. Oh! who——?

CLARA. Frederick dear, wake!

DE FŒNIX [*dazed*]. How did this occur?

CLARA. You were tottering, and I caught you.

DE FŒNIX [*collecting his senses*]. I wemember. I placed myself in an upwight position, dearwest, to prewent myself dozing.

CLARA [*sinking on to the couch*]. How you alarmed me!

[*Seeing that* ROSE *is laughing,* DE FŒNIX *comes down to her.*

DE FŒNIX [*in a low voice*]. Might have been a very serwious accident, Miss Trelawny.

ROSE [*seating herself on the footstool*]. Never mind! [*Pointing to the chair she has vacated*] Sit down and talk. [*He glances at the old people and shakes his head.*] Oh, do, do, do! do sit down, and let us all have a jolly whisper. [*He sits.*] Thank you, Captain Fred. Go on! tell me something—anything; something about the military——

DE FŒNIX [*again looking at the old people, then wagging his finger at* ROSE]. I know; you want to get me into a wow. [*Settling himself into his chair*] Howwid girl!

ROSE [*despairingly*]. Oh—h—h!

[*There is a brief pause, and then the sound of a street-organ, playing in the distance, is heard. The air is "Ever of Thee."*

ROSE. Hark! [*Excitedly*] Hark!

CLARA, ARTHUR, *and* DE FŒNIX. Hush!

ROSE [*heedlessly*]. The song I sang in *The Pedlar—The Pedlar of Marseilles*! the song that used to make you cry, Arthur——! [*They attempt vainly to hush her down, but she continues dramatically, in hoarse whispers.*] And then Raphael enters—comes on to the bridge. The music continues, softly. "Raphael, why have you kept me waiting?

Man, do you wish to break my heart—[*thumping her breast*] a woman's hear—r—rt, Raphael?"

[Sir William *and* Miss Gower *suddenly whip off their newspapers and sit erect.* Sir William *is a grim, bullet-headed old gentleman of about seventy;* Miss Gower *a spare, prim lady, of gentle manners, verging upon sixty. They stare at each other for a moment, silently.*

Sir William. What a hideous riot, Trafalgar!

Miss Gower. Rose dear, I hope I have been mistaken—but through my sleep I fancied I could hear you shrieking at the top of your voice.

[Sir William *gets on to his feet; all rise, except* Rose, *who remains seated sullenly.*

Sir William. Trafalgar, it is becoming impossible for you and me to obtain repose. [*Turning his head sharply*] Ha! is not that a street-organ? [*To* Miss Gower] An organ?

Miss Gower. Undoubtedly. An organ in the Square, at this hour of the evening—singularly out of place!

Sir William [*looking round*]. Well, well, well, does no one stir?

Rose [*under her breath*]. Oh, don't stop it!

[Clara *goes out quickly. With a great show of activity* Arthur *and* de Fœnix *hurry across the room and, when there, do nothing.*

Sir William [*coming upon* Rose *and peering down at her*]. What are ye upon the floor for, my dear! Have we no cheers? [*To* Miss Gower *—producing his snuff-box*] Do we lack cheers here, Trafalgar?

Miss Gower [*going to* Rose]. My dear Rose! [*Raising her*] Come, come, come, this is quite out of place! Young ladies do not crouch and huddle upon the ground—do they, William?

Sir William [*taking snuff*]. A moment ago I should have hazarded the opinion that they do not. [*Chuckling unpleasantly*] He, he, he!

[Clara *returns. The organ music ceases abruptly.*

Clara [*coming to* Sir William]. Charles was just running out to stop the organ when I reached the hall, Grandpa.

Sir William. Ye'd surely no intention, Clara, of venturing, yourself, into the public street—the open Square——?

Clara [*faintly*]. I meant only to wave at the man from the door——

Miss Gower. Oh, Clara, that would hardly have been in place!

Sir William [*raising his hands*]. In mercy's name, Trafalgar, what *is* befalling my household?

Miss Gower [*bursting into tears*]. Oh, William——!

[Rose *and* Clara *creep away and join the others.* Miss Gower *totters to* Sir William *and drops her head upon his breast.*

Sir William. Tut, tut, tut, tut!

Miss Gower [*between her sobs*]. I—I—I—I know what is in your mind.

SIR WILLIAM [*drawing a long breath*]. Ah—h—h—h!

MISS GOWER. Oh, my dear brother, be patient!

SIR WILLIAM. Patient!

MISS GOWER. Forgive me; I should have said hopeful. Be hopeful that I shall yet succeed in ameliorating the disturbing conditions which are affecting us so cruelly.

SIR WILLIAM. Ye never will, Trafalgar; *I've* tried.

MISS GOWER. Oh, do not despond already! I feel sure there are good ingredients in Rose's character. [*Clinging to him*] In time, William, we shall shape her to be a fitting wife for our rash and unfortunate Arthur—— [*He shakes his head.*] In time, William, in time!

SIR WILLIAM [*soothing her*]. Well, well, well! there, there, there! At least, my dear sister, I am perfectly aweer that I possess in you the woman above all others whose example should compel such a transformation.

MISS GOWER [*throwing her arms about his neck*]. Oh, brother, what a compliment——!

SIR WILLIAM. Tut, tut, tut! And now, before Charles sets the card-table, don't you think we had better—eh, Trafalgar?

MISS GOWER. Yes, yes—our disagreeable duty; let us discharge it. [SIR WILLIAM *takes snuff.*] Rose dear, be seated. [*To everybody*] The Vice-Chancellor has something to say to us. Let us all be seated.

[*There is consternation among the young people. All sit.*

SIR WILLIAM [*peering about him*]. Are ye seated?

EVERYBODY. Yes.

SIR WILLIAM. What I desire to say is this. When Miss Trelawny took up her residence here it was thought proper, in the peculiar circumstances of the case, that you, Arthur—[*pointing a finger at* ARTHUR] you——

ARTHUR. Yes, sir.

SIR WILLIAM. That you should remove yourself to the establishment of your sister Clara and her husband in Holles Street, round the corner——

ARTHUR. Yes, sir.

CLARA. Yes, Grandpa.

DE FŒNIX. Certainly, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. Taking your food in this house, and spending other certain hours here, under the surveillance of your great-aunt Trafalgar.

MISS GOWER. Yes, William.

SIR WILLIAM. This was considered to be a decorous, and, toward Miss Trelawny, a highly respectful, course to pursue.

ARTHUR. Yes, sir.

MISS GOWER. Any other course would have been out of place.

SIR WILLIAM. And yet—[*again extending a finger at* ARTHUR] what is this that is reported to me?

ARTHUR. I don't know, sir.

SIR WILLIAM. I hear that ye have on several occasions, at night, after having quitted this house with Captain and Mrs de Fœnix, been seen on the other side of the way, your back against the railings, gazing up at Miss Trelawny's window; and that you have remained in that position for a considerable space of time. Is this true, sir?

ROSE [*boldly*]. Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. I venture to put a question to my grandson, Miss Trelawny.

ARTHUR. Yes, sir, it is quite true.

SIR WILLIAM. Then, sir, let me acqueent you that these are not the manners, nor the practices, of a gentleman.

ARTHUR. No, sir?

SIR WILLIAM. No, sir, they are the manners, and the practices, of a troubadour.

MISS GOWER. A troubadour in Cavendish Square! quite out of place!

ARTHUR. I—I'm very sorry, sir; I—I never looked at it in that light.

SIR WILLIAM [*snuffing*]. Ah—h—h—h! ho! pi—i—i—sh!

ARTHUR. But at the same time, sir, I dare say—of course I don't speak from precise knowledge—but I dare say there were a good many—a good many——

SIR WILLIAM. Good many—what sir?

ARTHUR. A good many very respectable troubadours, sir——

ROSE [*starting to her feet, heroically and defiantly*]. And what I wish to say, Sir William, is this. I wish to avow, to declare before the world, that Arthur and I have had many lengthy interviews while he has been stationed against those railings over there; I murmuring to him softly from my bedroom window, he responding in tremulous whispers——

SIR WILLIAM [*struggling to his feet*]. You—you tell me such things——! [*All rise.*

MISS GOWER. The Square, in which we have resided for years——! Our neighbours——!

SIR WILLIAM [*shaking a trembling hand at* ARTHUR]. The—the character of my house——!

ARTHUR. Again I am extremely sorry, sir—but these are the only confidential conversations Rose and I now enjoy.

SIR WILLIAM [*turning upon* CLARA *and* DE FŒNIX]. And you, Captain de Fœnix—an officer and a gentleman! and you, Clara! this could scarcely have been without your cognizance, without, perhaps, your approval——!

[CHARLES, *in plush and powder and wearing luxuriant whiskers, enters, carrying two branch candlesticks with lighted candles.*

CHARLES. The cawd-table, Sir William?

MISS GOWER [*agitatedly*]. Yes, yes, by all means, Charles; the card-

table, as usual. [*To* Sir William] A rubber will comfort you, soothe you——

[Charles *carries the candlesticks to the card-table,* Sir William *and* Miss Gower *seat themselves upon a couch, she with her arm through his affectionately.* Clara *and* de Fœnix *get behind the screen; their scared faces are seen occasionally over the top of it.* Charles *brings the card-table, opens it, and arranges it, placing four chairs, which he collects from different parts of the room, round the table.* Rose *and* Arthur *talk in rapid undertones.*

Rose. Infamous! infamous!

Arthur. Be calm, Rose dear, be calm!

Rose. Tyrannical! diabolical! I cannot endure it.

[*She throws herself into a chair. He stands behind her, apprehensively, endeavouring to calm her.*

Arthur [*over her shoulder*]. They mean well, dearest——

Rose [*hysterically*]. Well! ha, ha, ha!

Arthur. But they are rather old-fashioned people——

Rose. Old-fashioned! they belong to the time when men and women were put to the torture. I am being tortured—mentally tortured——

Arthur. They have not many more years in this world——

Rose. Nor I, at this rate, many more months. They are killing me—like Agnes in *The Spectre of St Ives.* She expires, in the fourth act, as I shall die in Cavendish Square, painfully, of no recognized disorder——

Arthur. And anything we can do to make them happy——

Rose. To make the Vice-Chancellor happy! I won't try! I will not! he's a fiend, a vampire——!

Arthur. Oh, hush!

Rose [*snatching up* Sir William's *snuff-box, which he has left upon the table*]. His snuff-box! I wish I could poison his snuff, as Lucrezia Borgia would have done. *She* would have removed him within two hours of my arrival—I mean, her arrival. [*Opening the snuff-box and mimicking* Sir William] And here he sits and lectures me, and dictates to me! to Miss Trelawny! "I venture to put a question to my grandson, Miss Trelawny!" Ha, ha! [*Taking a pinch of snuff, thoughtlessly but vigorously*] "Yah—h—h—h! pish! Have we no cheers? do we lack cheers here, Trafalgar?" [*Suddenly*] Oh——!

Arthur. What have you done?

Rose [*in suspense, replacing the snuff-box*]. The snuff——!

Arthur. Rose dear!

Rose [*putting her handkerchief to her nose, and rising*]. Ah——!

[Charles, *having prepared the card-table, and arranged the candlesticks upon it, has withdrawn.* Miss Gower *and* Sir William *now rise.*

MISS GOWER. The table is prepared, William. Arthur, I assume you would prefer to sit and contemplate Rose——?

ARTHUR. Thank you, Aunt.

[ROSE *sneezes violently, and is led away, helplessly, by* ARTHUR.

MISS GOWER [*to* ROSE]. Oh, my dear child! [*Looking round*] Where are Frederick and Clara?

CLARA *and* DE FŒNIX [*appearing from behind the screen, shamefacedly*]. Here.

[*The intending players cut the pack and seat themselves.* SIR WILLIAM *sits facing* CAPTAIN DE FŒNIX, MISS GOWER *on the right of the table, and* CLARA *on the left.*

ARTHUR [*while this is going on, to* ROSE]. Are you in pain, dearest? Rose!

ROSE. Agony!

ARTHUR. Pinch your upper lip——

[*She sneezes twice, loudly, and sinks back upon the couch.*

SIR WILLIAM [*testily*]. Sssh! sssh! this is to be whist, I hope.

MISS GOWER. Rose, Rose! young ladies do not sneeze quite so continuously. [DE FŒNIX *is dealing.*

SIR WILLIAM [*with gusto*]. I will thank you, Captain de Fœnix, to exercise your intelligence this evening to its furthest limit.

DE FŒNIX. I'll twy, sir.

SIR WILLIAM [*laughing unpleasantly*]. He, he, he! last night, sir——

CLARA. Poor Frederick had toothache last night, Grandpa.

SIR WILLIAM [*tartly*]. Whist is whist, Clara, and toothache is toothache. We will endeavour to keep the two things distinct, if you please. He, he!

MISS GOWER. Your interruption was hardly in place, Clara dear—ah!

DE FŒNIX. Hey! what——?

MISS GOWER. A misdeal.

CLARA [*faintly*]. Oh, Frederick!

SIR WILLIAM [*partly rising*]. Captain de Fœnix!

DE FŒNIX. I—I'm fwightfully gwieved, sir——

[*The cards are redealt by* MISS GOWER. ROSE *now gives way to a violent paroxysm of sneezing.* SIR WILLIAM *rises.*

MISS GOWER. William——! [*The players rise.*

SIR WILLIAM [*to the players*]. Is this whist, may I ask? [*They sit.*

SIR WILLIAM [*standing*]. Miss Trelawny——

ROSE [*weakly*]. I—I think I had better—what d'ye call it?—withdraw for a few moments.

SIR WILLIAM [*sitting again*]. Do so.

[ROSE *disappears.* ARTHUR *is leaving the room with her.*

MISS GOWER [*sharply*]. Arthur! where are you going?

ARTHUR [*returning promptly*]. I beg your pardon, Aunt.

Miss Gower. Really, Arthur——!

Sir William [*rapping upon the table*]. Tsch, tsch, tsch!

Miss Gower. Forgive me, William. [*They play.*

Sir William [*intent upon his cards*]. My snuff-box, Arthur; be so obleeging as to search for it.

Arthur [*brightly*]. I'll bring it to you, sir. It is on the——

Sir William. Keep your voice down, sir. We are playing—[*emphatically throwing down a card, as fourth player*] whist. Mine.

Miss Gower [*picking up the trick*]. No, William.

Sir William [*glaring*]. No!

Miss Gower. Clara played a trump.

De Fœnix. Yes, sir, Clara played a trump—the seven——

Sir William. I will not trouble you, Captain de Fœnix, to echo Miss Gower's information.

De Fœnix. Vevy sowwy, sir.

Miss Gower [*gently*]. It *was* a *little* out of place, Frederick.

Sir William. Sssh! whist. [Arthur *is now on* Sir William's *right, with the snuff-box.*] Eh? what? [*Taking the snuff-box from* Arthur] Oh, thank ye. Much obleeged, much obleeged.

[Arthur *walks away and picks up a book.* Sir William *turns in his chair, watching* Arthur.

Miss Gower. You to play, William. [*A pause.*] William dear——?

[*She also turns, following the direction of his gaze. Laying down his cards,* Sir William *leaves the card-table and goes over to* Arthur *slowly. Those at the card-table look on apprehensively.*

Sir William [*in a queer voice*]. Arthur.

Arthur [*shutting his book*]. Excuse me, Grandfather.

Sir William. Ye—ye're a troublesome young man, Arthur.

Arthur. I—I don't mean to be one, sir.

Sir William. As your poor father was, before ye. And if you are fool enough to marry, and to beget children, doubtless your son will follow the same course. [*Taking snuff*] Y—y—yes, but I shall be dead 'n' gone by that time, it's likely. Ah—h—h—h! pi—i—i—sh! I shall be sitting in the Court Above by that time—— [*From the adjoining room comes the sound of* Rose's *voice singing "Ever of Thee" to the piano. There is great consternation at the card-table.* Arthur *is moving towards the folding-doors,* Sir William *detains him.*] No, no, let her go on, I beg. Let her continue. [*Returning to the card-table, with deadly calmness*] We will suspend our game while this young lady performs her operas.

Miss Gower [*rising and taking his arm*]. William——!

Sir William [*in the same tone*]. I fear this is no longer a comfortable home for ye, Trafalgar; no longer the home for a gentlewoman. I apprehend that in these days my house approaches somewhat closely to

a Pandemonium. [*Suddenly taking up the cards, in a fury, and flinging them across the room*] And this is whist—whist——!

[CLARA *and* DE FŒNIX *rise and stand together.* ARTHUR *pushes open the upper part of the folding-doors.*

ARTHUR. Rose! stop! Rose! [*The song ceases and* ROSE *appears.*

ROSE [*at the folding-doors*]. Did anyone call?

ARTHUR. You have upset my grandfather.

MISS GOWER. Miss Trelawny, how—how dare you do anything so—so out of place?

ROSE. There's a piano in there, Miss Gower.

MISS GOWER. You are acquainted with the rule of this household—no music when the Vice-Chancellor is within doors.

ROSE. But there are so many rules. One of them is that you may not sneeze.

MISS GOWER. Ha! you must never answer——

ROSE. No, that's another rule.

MISS GOWER. Oh, for shame!

ARTHUR. You see, Aunt, Rose is young, and—and—you make no allowance for her, give her no chance——

MISS GOWER. Great heaven! what is this you are charging me with?

ARTHUR. I don't think the 'rules' of this house are fair to Rose! oh, I must say it—they are horribly unfair!

MISS GOWER [*clinging to* SIR WILLIAM]. Brother!

SIR WILLIAM. Trafalgar! [*Putting her aside and advancing to* ARTHUR] Oh, indeed, sir! and so you deliberately accuse your great-aunt of acting toward ye and Miss Trelawny *mala fide*——

ARTHUR. Grandfather, what I intended to——

SIR WILLIAM. I will afford ye the opportunity of explaining what ye intended to convey downstairs, at once, in the library. [*A general shudder.*] Obleege me by following me, sir. [*To* CLARA *and* DE FŒNIX] Captain de Fœnix, I see no prospect of any further social relaxation this evening. You and Clara will do me the favour of attending in the hall, in readiness to take this young man back to Holles Street. [*Giving his arm to* MISS GOWER] My dear sister—— [*To* ARTHUR] Now, sir.

[SIR WILLIAM *and* MISS GOWER *go out.* ARTHUR *comes to* ROSE *and kisses her.*

ARTHUR. Good night, dearest. Oh, good night! Oh, Rose——!

SIR WILLIAM [*outside the door*]. Mr Arthur Gower!

ARTHUR. I am coming, sir—— [*He goes out quickly.*

DE FŒNIX [*approaching* ROSE *and taking her hand sympathetically*]. Haw——! I—weally—haw——!

ROSE. Yes, I know what you would say. Thank you, Captain Fred.

CLARA [*embracing* ROSE]. Never mind! we will continue to let ARTHUR

out at night as usual. I am a married woman! [*joining* DE FŒNIX] and a married woman will turn, if you tread upon her often enough——!

[DE FŒNIX *and* CLARA *depart.*

ROSE [*pacing the room, shaking her hands in the air desperately*]. Oh—h—h! ah—h—h!

[*The upper part of the folding-doors opens, and* CHARLES *appears.*

CHARLES [*mysteriously*]. Miss Rose——

ROSE. What——?

CHARLES [*advancing*]. I see Sir William h'and the rest descend the stairs. I 'ave been awaitin' the chawnce of 'andin' you this, Miss Rose.

[*He produces a dirty scrap of paper, wet and limp, with writing upon it, and gives it to her.*

ROSE [*handling it daintily*]. Oh, it's damp——!

CHARLES. Yes, miss; a little gentle shower 'ave been takin' place h'outside—'eat spots, cook says.

ROSE [*reading*]. Ah! from some of my friends.

CHARLES [*behind his hand*]. Perfesshunnal, Miss Rose?

ROSE [*intent upon the note*]. Yes—yes——

CHARLES. I was reprimandin' the organ, miss, when I observed them lollin' against the square railin's examinin' h'our premises, and they wentured for to beckon me. An egstremely h'affable party, miss. [*Hiding his face*] Ho! one of them caused me to laff!

ROSE [*excitedly*]. They want to speak to me—[*referring to the note*] to impart something to me of an important nature. Oh, Charles, I know not what to do!

CHARLES [*languishingly*]. Whatever friends may loll against them railin's h'opposite, Miss Rose, you 'ave one true friend in this 'ouse—Chawles Gibbons——

ROSE. Thank you, Charles. Mr Briggs, the butler, is sleeping out to-night, isn't he?

CHARLES. Yes, miss, he 'ave leave to sleep at his sister's. I 'appen to know he 'ave gone to Cremorne.

ROSE. Then, when Sir William and Miss Gower have retired, do you think you could let me go forth; and wait at the front door while I run across and grant my friends a hurried interview?

CHARLES. Suttingly, miss.

ROSE. If it reached the ears of Sir William, or Miss Gower, you would lose your place, Charles!

CHARLES [*haughtily*]. I'm aweer, miss; but Sir William was egstremely rood to me dooring dinner, over that mis'ap to the ontray—— [*A bell rings violently.*] S'william!

[*He goes out. The rain is heard pattering against the window-panes.* ROSE *goes from one window to another, looking out. It is now almost black outside the windows.*

ROSE [*discovering her friends*]. Ah! yes, yes! ah—h—h—h! [*She snatches an antimacassar from a chair and jumping on to the couch, waves it frantically to those outside.*] The dears! the darlings! the faithful creatures——! [*Listening*] Oh——!

[*She descends, in a hurry, and flings the antimacassar under the couch, as* MISS GOWER *enters. At the same moment there is a vivid flash of lightning.*

MISS GOWER [*startled*]. Oh, how dreadful! [*To* ROSE, *frigidly*] The Vice-Chancellor has *felt* the few words he has addressed to Arthur, and has retired for the night. [*There is a roll of thunder.* ROSE *is alarmed;* MISS GOWER *clings to a chair.*] Mercy on us! Go to bed, child, directly. We will all go to our beds, hoping to awake to-morrow in a meeker and more submissive spirit. [*Kissing* ROSE *upon the brow*] Good night. [*Another flash of lightning.*] Oh——! Don't omit to say your prayers, Rose—and in a simple manner. I always fear that, from your peculiar training, you may declaim them. That is so out of place—oh——!

[*Another roll of thunder.* ROSE *goes across the room, meeting* CHARLES, *who enters carrying a lantern. They exchange significant glances, and she disappears.*

CHARLES [*coming to* MISS GOWER]. I am now at liberty to accompany you round the 'ouse, ma'am—— [*A flash of lightning.*

MISS GOWER. Ah——! [*Her hand to her heart*] Thank you, Charles—but to-night I must ask you to see that everything is secure, alone. This storm—so very seasonable; but, from girlhood, I could never—— [*A roll of thunder.*] Oh, good night!

[*She flutters away. The rain beats still more violently upon the window-panes.*

CHARLES [*glancing at the window*]. Ph—e—e—w! Great 'evans!

[*He is dropping the curtains at the window when* ROSE *appears at the folding doors.*

ROSE [*in a whisper*]. Charles!

CHARLES. Miss?

ROSE [*coming into the room, distractedly*]. Miss Gower has gone to bed.

CHARLES. Yes, miss—oh——! [*A flash of lightning.*

ROSE. Oh! my friends! my poor friends!

CHARLES. *H'and* Mr Briggs at Cremorne! Reelly, I should 'ardly advise you to venture h'out, miss——

ROSE. Out! no! Oh, but get them in!

CHARLES. *In*, Miss Rose! indoors!

ROSE. Under cover—— [*A roll of thunder.*] Oh! [*Wringing her hands*] They are my friends! is it a rule that I am never to see a friend, that I mayn't even give a friend shelter in a violent storm? [*To* CHARLES] Are you the only one up?

CHARLES. I b'lieve so, miss. Any'ow the wimming-servants is quite h'under my control.

ROSE. Then tell my friends to be deathly quiet, and to creep—to tiptoe—— [*The rain strikes the window again. She picks up the lantern which* CHARLES *has deposited upon the floor, and gives it to him.*] Make haste! I'll draw the curtains—— [*He hurries out. She goes from window to window, dropping the curtains, talking to herself excitedly as she does so.*] My friends! my own friends! ah! I'm not to sneeze in this house! nor to sing! or breathe, next! wretches! oh, my! wretches! [*Blowing out the candles and removing the candlesticks to the table, singing, under her breath, wildly*] "Ever of thee I'm fondly dreaming——" [*Mimicking* SIR WILLIAM *again*] "What are ye upon the floor for, my dear? Have we no cheers? do we lack cheers here, Trafalgar——?"

[CHARLES *returns.*

CHARLES [*to those who follow him*]. Hush! [*To* ROSE] I discovered 'em clustered in the doorway——

[*There is a final peal of thunder as* AVONIA, GADD, COLPOYS, *and* TOM WRENCH *enter, somewhat diffidently. They are apparently soaked to their skins, and are altogether in a deplorable condition.* AVONIA *alone has an umbrella, which she allows to drip upon the carpet, but her dress and petticoats are bedraggled, her finery limp, her hair lank and loose.*

ROSE. 'Vonia!

AVONIA [*coming to her, and embracing her fervently*]. Oh, ducky, ducky, ducky! oh, but what a storm!

ROSE. Hush! how wet you are! [*Shaking hands with* GADD] Ferdinand—[*crossing to* COLPOYS *and shaking hands with him*] Augustus—[*shaking hands with* TOM] Tom Wrench——

AVONIA [*to* CHARLES]. Be so kind as to put my umbrella on the landing, will you? Oh, thank you very much, I'm sure.

[CHARLES *withdraws with the umbrella.* GADD *and* COLPOYS *shake the rain from their hats on to the carpet and furniture.*

TOM [*quietly, to* ROSE]. It's a shame to come down on you in this way. But they would do it, and I thought I'd better stick to 'em.

GADD [*who is a little flushed and unsteady*]. Ha! I shall remember this accursed evening.

AVONIA. Oh, Ferdy——!

ROSE. Hush! you must be quiet. Everybody has gone to bed, and I—I'm not sure I'm allowed to receive visitors——

AVONIA. Oh!

GADD. Then we are intruders?

ROSE. I mean, such late visitors.

[COLPOYS *has taken off his coat, and is shaking it vigorously.*

AVONIA. Stop it, Augustus! ain't I wet enough? [*To* ROSE] Yes, it

is latish, but I so wanted to inform you—here—[*bringing* GADD *forward*] allow me to introduce—my husband.

ROSE. Oh! no!

AVONIA [*laughing merrily*]. Yes! ha, ha, ha!

ROSE. Sssh, sssh, sssh!

AVONIA. I forgot. [*To* GADD] Oh, darling Ferdy, you're positively soaked! [*To* ROSE] Do let him take his coat off, like Gussy——

GADD [*jealously*]. 'Vonia, not so much of the Gussy!

AVONIA. There you are, flying out again! as if Mr Colpoys wasn't an old friend!

GADD. Old friend or no old friend——

ROSE [*diplomatically*]. Certainly, take your coat off, Ferdinand.

[GADD *joins* COLPOYS; *they spread out their coats upon the couch.*

ROSE [*feeling* TOM's *coat-sleeve*]. And you?

TOM [*after glancing at the others—quietly*]. No, thank you.

AVONIA [*sitting*]. Yes, dearie, Ferdy and I were married yesterday.

ROSE [*sitting*]. Yesterday!

AVONIA. Yesterday morning. We're on our honeymoon now. You know, the 'Wells' shut a fortnight after you left us, and neither Ferdy nor me could fix anything, just for the present, elsewhere; and as we hadn't put by during the season—you know, it never struck us to put by during the season—we thought we'd get married.

ROSE. Oh, yes.

AVONIA. You see, a man and his wife can live almost on what keeps one, rent *and* ceterer; and so, being deeply attached, as I tell you, we went off to church and did the deed. Oh, it will be such a save. [*Looking up at* GADD *coyly*] Oh, Ferdy——!

GADD [*laying his hand upon her head, dreamily*]. Yes, child, I confess I love you——

COLPOYS [*behind* ROSE, *imitating* GADD]. Child, I confess I adore you.

TOM [*taking* COLPOYS *by the arm and swinging him away from* ROSE]. Enough of that, Colpoys!

COLPOYS. What!

ROSE [*rising*]. Hush!

TOM [*under his breath*]. If you've never learnt how to behave——

COLPOYS. Don't you teach behaviour, sir, to a gentleman who plays a superior line of business to yourself! [*Muttering*] 'Pon my soul! rum start——!

AVONIA [*going to* ROSE]. Of course I ought to have written to you, dear, properly, but you remember the weeks it takes me to write a letter—— [GADD *sits in the chair* AVONIA *has just quitted; she returns and seats herself upon his knee.*] And so I said to Ferdy, over tea, "Ferdy, let's spend a bit of our honeymoon in doing the West End

thoroughly, and going and seeing where Rose Trelawny lives." And we thought it only nice and polite to invite Tom Wrench and Gussy——

GADD. 'Vonia, much less of the Gussy!

AVONIA [*kissing* GADD]. Jealous boy! [*Beaming*] Oh, and we *have* done the West End thoroughly. There, I've never done the West End so thoroughly in my life! And when we got outside your house I couldn't resist—— [*Her hand on* GADD's *shirt-sleeve*] Oh, gracious! I'm sure you'll catch your death, my darling——!

ROSE. I think I can get him some wine. [*To* GADD] Will you take some wine, Ferdinand? [GADD *rises, nearly upsetting* AVONIA.

AVONIA. Ferdy!

GADD. I thank you. [*With a wave of the hand*] Anything, anything——

AVONIA [*to* ROSE]. Anything that goes with stout, dear.

ROSE [*at the door, turning to them*]. 'Vonia—boys—be very still.

AVONIA. Trust *us*!

[ROSE *tiptoes out.* COLPOYS *is now at the card-table, cutting a pack of cards which remains there.*

COLPOYS [*to* GADD]. Gadd, I'll see you for pennies.

GADD [*loftily*]. Done, sir, with you!

[*They seat themselves at the table, and cut for coppers.* TOM *is walking about, surveying the room.*

AVONIA [*taking off her hat and wiping it with her handkerchief*]. Well, Thomas, what do you think of it?

TOM. *This* is the kind of chamber I want for the first act of my comedy——

AVONIA. Oh, Lor', your head's continually running on your comedy. Half this blessed evening——

TOM. I tell you, I won't have doors stuck here, there, and everywhere; no, nor windows in all sorts of impossible places!

AVONIA. Oh, really! Well, when you do get your play accepted, mind you see that Mr Manager gives you exactly what you ask for—won't you?

TOM. You needn't be satirical, if you *are* wet. Yes, I will! [*Pointing to the left*] Windows on the one side, [*pointing to the right*] doors on the other—just where they should be, architecturally. And locks on the doors, *real locks*, to work; and handles—to turn! [*Rubbing his hands together gleefully*] Ha, ha! you wait! wait——!

[ROSE *re-enters, with a plate of biscuits in her hand, followed by* CHARLES, *who carries a decanter of sherry and some wine-glasses.*

ROSE. Here, Charles——

[CHARLES *places the decanter and the glasses on the table.*

GADD [*whose luck has been against him, throwing himself, sulkily, on to the couch*]. Bah! I'll risk no further stake.

COLPOYS. Just because you lose sevenpence in coppers you go on like this! [CHARLES, *turning from the table, faces* COLPOYS.

COLPOYS [*tearing his hair, and glaring at* CHARLES *wildly*]. Ah—h—h, I am ruined! I have lost my all! my children are beggars——!

CHARLES. Ho, ho, ho! he, he, he!

ROSE. Hush, hush! [CHARLES *goes out laughing. To everybody*] Sherry?

GADD [*rising*]. Sherry!

[AVONIA, COLPOYS, *and* GADD *gather round the table, and help themselves to sherry and biscuits.*

ROSE [*to* TOM]. Tom, won't you——?

TOM [*watching* GADD *anxiously*]. No, thank you. The fact is, we—we have already partaken of refreshments, once or twice during the evening——

[COLPOYS *and* AVONIA, *each carrying a glass of wine and munching a biscuit, go to the couch, where they sit.*

GADD [*pouring out sherry—singing*] "And let me the canakin clink, clink——"

ROSE [*coming to him*]. Be quiet, Gadd!

COLPOYS [*raising his glass*]. The Bride!

ROSE [*turning, kissing her hand to* AVONIA]. Yes, yes—— [GADD *hands* ROSE *his glass; she puts her lips to it.*] The Bride!

[*She returns the glass to* GADD.

GADD [*sitting*]. My bride!

[TOM, *from behind the table, unperceived, takes the decanter and hides it under the table, then sits.* GADD, *missing the decanter, contents himself with the biscuits.*

AVONIA. Well, Rose, my darling, we've been talking about nothing but ourselves. How are you getting along here?

ROSE. Getting along? Oh, I—I don't fancy I'm getting along very well, thank you!

COLPOYS *and* AVONIA. Not——!

GADD [*his mouth full of biscuit*]. Not——!

ROSE [*sitting by the card-table*]. No, boys; no, 'Vonia. The truth is, it isn't as nice as you'd think it. I suppose the Profession had its drawbacks—Mother used to say so—but [*raising her arms*] one could fly. Yes, in Brydon Crescent one was a dirty little London sparrow, perhaps; but here, in this grand Square——! Oh, it's the story of the caged bird, over again!

AVONIA. A love-bird, though.

ROSE. Poor Arthur? Yes, he's a dear. [*Rising*] But the Gowers—the old Gowers! the Gowers! the Gowers!

[*She paces the room, beating her hands together. In her excitement, she ceases to whisper, and gradually becomes loud and voluble. The others, following her lead, chatter*

*noisily—excepting* TOM, *who sits, thoughtfully, looking before him.*

ROSE. The ancient Gowers! the venerable Gowers!

AVONIA. You mean, the grandfather——?

ROSE. And the aunt—the great-aunt—the great bore of a great-aunt! The very mention of 'em makes something go "tap, tap, tap, tap" at the top of my head.

AVONIA. Oh, I *am* sorry to hear this. Well, upon my word——!

ROSE. Would you believe it? 'Vonia—boys—you'll never believe it! I mayn't walk out with Arthur alone, nor see him here alone. I mayn't sing; no, nor sneeze even——

AVONIA [*shrilly*]. Not sing or sneeze!

COLPOYS [*indignantly*]. Not sneeze!

ROSE. No, nor sit on the floor—the *floor*!

AVONIA. Why, when we shared rooms together you were always on the floor!

GADD [*producing a pipe, and knocking out the ashes on the heel of his boot*]. In heaven's name, what kind of house can this be!

AVONIA. I wouldn't stand it, would you, Ferdinand?

GADD [*loading his pipe*]. Gad, no!

AVONIA [*to* COLPOYS]. Would you, Gus dear?

GADD [*under his breath*]. Here! not so much of the Gus dear——

AVONIA [*to* COLPOYS]. Would you?

COLPOYS. No, I'm blessed if I would, my darling.

GADD [*his pipe in his mouth*]. Mr Colpoys! less of the darling!

AVONIA [*rising*]. Rose, don't you put up with it! [*Striking the top of the card-table vigorously*] I say, don't you stand it! [*Embracing* ROSE] You're an independent girl, dear; they came to you, these people, not you to them, remember.

ROSE [*sitting on the couch*]. Oh, what can I do? I can't do anything.

AVONIA. Can't you! [*Coming to* GADD] Ferdinand, advise her. You tell her how to——

GADD [*who has risen*]. Miss Bunn—Mrs Gadd, you have been all over Mr Colpoys this evening, ever since we——

AVONIA [*angrily, pushing him back into his chair*]. Oh, don't be a silly!

GADD. Madam!

AVONIA [*returning to* COLPOYS]. Gus, Ferdinand's foolish. Come and talk to Rose, and advise her, there's a dear boy——

[COLPOYS *rises; she takes his arm, to lead him to* ROSE. *At that moment* GADD *advances to* COLPOYS *and slaps his face.*

COLPOYS. Hey——!

GADD. Miserable viper!

[*The two men close.* TOM *runs to separate them.* ROSE *rises with a cry of terror. There is a struggle and general uproar.*

*The card-table is overturned, with a crash, and* AVONIA *utters a long and piercing shriek. Then the house-bells are heard ringing violently.*

ROSE. Oh——! [*The combatants part; all look scared. At the door, listening*] They are moving—coming! Turn out the——!

[*She turns out the light at the table. The room is in half-light as* SIR WILLIAM *enters, cautiously, closely followed by* MISS GOWER. *They are both in dressing-gowns and slippers;* SIR WILLIAM *carries a thick stick and his bedroom candle.* ROSE *is standing by a chair;* GADD, AVONIA, COLPOYS, *and* TOM *are together.*

SIR WILLIAM. Miss Trelawny——!

MISS GOWER. Rose——! [*Running behind the screen*] Men!

SIR WILLIAM. Who are these people?

ROSE [*advancing a step or two*]. Some friends of mine who used to be at the 'Wells' have called upon me, to inquire how I am getting on.

[ARTHUR *enters, quickly.*

ARTHUR [*looking round*]. Oh! Rose——!

SIR WILLIAM [*turning upon him*]. Ah—h—h—h! How come you here?

ARTHUR. I was outside the house. Charles let me in, knowing something was wrong.

SIR WILLIAM [*peering into his face*]. Troubadouring——?

ARTHUR. Troubadouring; yes, sir. [*To* ROSE] Rose, what is this?

SIR WILLIAM [*fiercely*]. No, sir, this is my affair. [*Placing his candlestick on the table*] Stand aside! [*Raising his stick furiously*] Stand aside!

[ARTHUR *moves to the right.*

MISS GOWER [*over the screen*]. William——

SIR WILLIAM. Hey?

MISS GOWER. Your ankles——

SIR WILLIAM [*adjusting his dressing-gown*]. I beg your pardon. [*To* ARTHUR] Yes, I can answer your question. [*Pointing his stick, first at* ROSE, *then at the group*] Some friends of that young woman's connected with—the playhouse, have favoured us with a visit, for the purpose of ascertaining how she is—getting on. [*Touching* GADD'S *pipe, which is lying at his feet, with the end of his stick*] A filthy tobacco-pipe. To whom does it belong? whose is it?

[ROSE *picks it up and passes it to* GADD, *bravely.*

ROSE. It belongs to one of my friends.

SIR WILLIAM [*taking* GADD'S *empty wine-glass and holding it to his nose*]. Phu, yes! In brief, a drunken debauch. [*To the group*] So ye see, gentlemen—[*to* AVONIA] and you, madam; [*to* ARTHUR] and you, sir; you see, all of ye, [*sinking into a chair, and coughing from exhaustion*] exactly how Miss Trelawny is getting on.

MISS GOWER [*over the screen*]. William——

SIR WILLIAM. What is it?

MISS GOWER. Your ankles——

SIR WILLIAM [*leaping to his feet, in a frenzy*]. Bah!

MISS GOWER. Oh, they seem so out of place!

SIR WILLIAM [*flourishing his stick*]. Begone! a set of garish, dissolute gipsies! begone!

[GADD, AVONIA, COLPOYS, *and* WRENCH *gather together, the men hastily putting on their coats, etc.*

AVONIA. Where's my umbrella?

GADD. A hand with my coat here!

COLPOYS. 'Pon my soul! London artists——!

AVONIA. We don't want to remain where we're not heartily welcome, I can assure everybody.

SIR WILLIAM. Open windows! let in the air!

AVONIA [*to* ROSE, *who is standing above the wreck of the card-table*]. Good-bye, my dear——

ROSE. No, no, 'Vonia. Oh, don't leave me behind you!

ARTHUR. Rose——!

ROSE. Oh, I'm very sorry, Arthur. [*To* SIR WILLIAM] Indeed, I am very sorry, Sir William. But you are right—gipsies—gipsies! [*To* ARTHUR] Yes, Arthur, if you were a gipsy, as I am, as these friends o' mine are, we might be happy together. But I've seen enough of your life, my dear boy, to know that I'm no wife for you. I should only be wretched, and would make you wretched; and the end, when it arrived, as it very soon would, would be much as it is to-night——!

ARTHUR [*distractedly*]. You'll let me see you, talk to you, to-morrow, Rose?

ROSE. No, never!

SIR WILLIAM [*sharply*]. You mean that?

ROSE [*facing him*]. Oh, don't be afraid. I give you my word.

SIR WILLIAM [*gripping her hand*]. Thank ye. Thank ye.

TOM [*quietly to* ARTHUR]. Mr Gower, come and see *me* to-morrow——

[*He moves away to the door.*

ROSE [*turning to* AVONIA, GADD, *and* COLPOYS]. I'm ready——

MISS GOWER [*coming from behind the screen to the back of the couch*]. Not to-night, child! not to-night! where will you go?

AVONIA [*holding* ROSE]. To her old quarters in Brydon Crescent. Send her things after her, if you please.

MISS GOWER. And then——?

ROSE. Then back to the 'Wells' again, Miss Gower! back to the 'Wells'——!

# THE THIRD ACT

*The scene represents an apartment on the second floor of* Mrs Mossop's *house. The room is of a humbler character than that shown in the First Act; but, though shabby, it is neat. On the right is a door, outside which is supposed to be the landing. In the wall at the back is another door, presumably admitting to a further chamber. On the left there is a fireplace, with a fire burning, and over the mantelpiece a mirror. In the left-hand corner of the room is a small bedstead with a tidily made bed, which can be hidden by a pair of curtains of some common and faded material, hanging from a cord slung from wall to wall. At the foot of the bedstead stands a large theatrical dress-basket. On the wall, by the head of the bed, are some pegs upon which hang a skirt or two and other articles of attire. On the right, against the back wall, there is a chest of drawers, the top of which is used as a washstand. In front of this is a small screen, and close by there are some more pegs with things hanging upon them. On the right wall, above the sofa, is a hanging bookcase with a few books. A small circular table, with a somewhat shabby cover upon it, stands near the fireplace. The walls are papered, the doors painted stone-colour. An old felt carpet is on the floor. The light is that of morning.*

Mrs Mossop, *now dressed in a workaday gown, has just finished making the bed. There is a knock at the centre door.*

Avonia [*from the adjoining room*]. Rose!

Mrs Mossop [*giving a final touch to the quilt*]. Eh?

Avonia. Is Miss Trelawny in her room?

Mrs Mossop. No, Mrs Gadd; she's at rehearsal.

Avonia. Oh——

[Mrs Mossop *draws the curtains, hiding the bed from view.* Avonia *enters by the door on the right in a morning wrapper which has seen its best days. She carries a pair of curling-tongs, and her hair is evidently in process of being dressed in ringlets.*

Avonia. Of course she is; I forgot There's a call for *The Pedlar of Marseilles.* Thank Gawd, *I'm* not in it. [*Singing*] "I'm a great guerilla chief, I'm a robber and a thief, I can either kill a foe or prig a pocket-handkerchief——"

Mrs Mossop [*dusting the ornaments on the mantelpiece*]. Bless your heart, you're very gay this morning!

Avonia. It's the pantomime. I'm always stark mad as the pantomime approaches. I don't grudge letting the rest of the company have

their fling at other times—but with the panto comes *my* turn. [*Throwing herself full length upon the sofa gleefully*] Ha, ha, ha! the turn of Avonia Bunn! [*With a change of tone*] I hope Miss Trelawny won't take a walk up to Highbury, or anywhere, after rehearsal. I want to borrow her gilt belt. My dress has arrived.

MRS MOSSOP [*much interested*]. No! has it?

AVONIA. Yes, Mrs Burroughs is coming down from the theatre at twelve-thirty to see me in it. [*Singing*] "Any kind of villainy cometh natural to me, So it endeth with a combat and a one, two, three——!"[1]

MRS MOSSOP [*surveying the room*]. Well, that's as cheerful as I can make things look, poor dear!

AVONIA [*taking a look round, seriously*]. It's pretty bright—if it wasn't for the idea of Rose Trelawny having to economize!

MRS MOSSOP. Ah—h!

AVONIA [*rising*]. That's what I can't swallow. [*Sticking her iron in the fire angrily*] One room! and on the second floor! [*Turning to* MRS MOSSOP] Of course, Gadd and me are one-room people too—and on the same floor; but then Gadd is so popular *out* of the theatre, Mrs Mossop—he's obliged to spend such a load of money at the Clown——

MRS MOSSOP [*who has been dusting the bookcase, coming to the table*]. Mrs Gadd, dearie, I'm sure I'm not in the least inquisitive; no one could accuse me of it—but I should like to know just one thing.

AVONIA [*testing her iron upon a sheet of paper which she takes from the table*]. What's that?

MRS MOSSOP. Why *have* they been and cut down Miss Trelawny's salary at the 'Wells?'

AVONIA [*hesitatingly*]. H'm, everybody's chattering about it; you could get to hear easily enough——

MRS MOSSOP. Oh, I dare say.

AVONIA. So I don't mind. Poor Rose! they tell her she can't act now, Mrs Mossop.

MRS MOSSOP. Can't act?

AVONIA. No, dear old girl, she's lost it; it's gone from her—the trick of it——

[TOM *enters by the door on the right, carrying a table-cover of a bright pattern.*

TOM [*coming upon* MRS MOSSOP, *disconcerted*]. Oh——!

MRS MOSSOP. My first-floor table-cover!

TOM. Y—y—yes. [*Exchanging the table-covers*] I thought, as the

[1] These snatches of song are from *The Miller and his Men*, a burlesque melodrama, by Francis Talfourd and Henry J. Byron, produced at the Strand Theatre, April 9, 1860.

Telfers have departed, and as their late sitting-room is at present vacant, that Miss Trelawny might enjoy the benefit—hey?

Mrs Mossop [*snatching up the old table-cover*]. Well, I never——!

[*She goes out.*

Avonia [*curling her hair, at the mirror over the mantelpiece*]. I say, Tom, I wonder if I've done wrong——

Tom. It all depends upon whether you've had the chance.

Avonia. I've told Mrs Mossop the reason they've reduced Rose's salary.

Tom. You needn't.

Avonia. She had only to ask any other member of the company——

Tom. To have found one who could have kept silent!

Avonia [*remorsefully*]. Oh, I could burn myself!

Tom. Besides, it isn't true.

Avonia. What——?

Tom. That Rose Trelawny is no longer up to her work.

Avonia [*sadly*]. Oh, Tom!

Tom. It isn't the fact, I say!

Avonia. Isn't it the fact that ever since Rose returned from Cavendish Square——?

Tom. She has been reserved, subdued, ladylike——

Avonia [*shrilly*]. She was always ladylike!

Tom. I'm aware of that!

Avonia. Well, then, what do you mean by——?

Tom [*in a rage, turning away*]. Oh——!

Avonia [*heating her irons again*]. The idea!

Tom [*cooling down*]. She was always a ladylike *actress*, on the stage and off it, but now she has developed into a—[*at a loss*] into a——

Avonia [*scornfully*]. Ha!

Tom. Into a ladylike human being. These fools at the 'Wells'! Can't act, can't she! No, she can no longer *spout*, she can no longer *ladle*, the vapid trash, the—the—the turgid rodomontade——

Avonia [*doubtfully*]. You'd better be careful of your language, Wrench.

Tom [*with a twinkle in his eye—mopping his brow*]. You're a married woman, 'Vonia——

Avonia [*holding her irons to her cheek, modestly*]. I know, but still——

Tom. Yes, deep down in the well of that girl's nature there has been lying a little, bright, clear pool of genuine refinement, girlish simplicity. And now the bucket has been lowered by love; experience has turned the handle; and up comes the crystal to the top, pure and sparkling. Why, her broken engagement to poor young Gower has really been the making of her! It has transformed her! Can't act, can't she! [*Drawing a long breath*] How she would play Dora in my comedy!

AVONIA. Ho, that comedy!

TOM. How she would murmur those love-scenes!

AVONIA. Murder——!

TOM [*testily*]. Murmur. [*Partly to himself*] Do you know, 'Vonia, I had Rose in my mind when I imagined Dora——?

AVONIA. Ha, ha! you astonish me.

TOM [*sitting*]. And Arthur Gower when I wrote the character of Gerald, Dora's lover. [*In a low voice*] Gerald and Dora—Rose and Arthur—Gerald and Dora. [*Suddenly*] 'Vonia——!

AVONIA [*singeing her hair*]. Ah——! oh, Lor'! what now?

TOM. I wish you could keep a secret.

AVONIA. Why, can't I?

TOM. Haven't you just been gossiping with Mother Mossop?

AVONIA [*behind his chair, breathlessly, her eyes bolting*]. A secret, Tom?

TOM [*nodding*]. I should like to share it with you because—you are fond of her too——

AVONIA. Ah——!

TOM. And because the possession of it is worrying me. But there, I can't trust you.

AVONIA. Mr Wrench!

TOM. No, you're a warm-hearted woman, 'Vonia, but you're a sieve.

AVONIA [*going down upon her knees beside him*]. I swear! By all my hopes, Tom Wrench, of hitting 'em as Prince Charming in the coming pantomime, I swear I will not divulge, leave alone tell a living soul, any secret you may intrust to me, or let me know of, concerning Rose Trelawny of the 'Wells.' Amen!

TOM [*in her ear*]. 'Vonia, *I know where Arthur Gower is.*

AVONIA. *Is!* isn't he still in London?

TOM [*producing a letter mysteriously*]. No. When Rose stuck to her refusal to see him—listen—mind, not a word——!

AVONIA. By all my hopes——!

TOM [*checking her*]. All right, all right! [*Reading*] "Theatre Royal, Bristol. Friday——"

AVONIA. Theatre Royal, Br——!

TOM. Be quiet! [*Reading*] "My dear Mr Wrench: A whole week, and not a line from you to tell me how Miss Trelawny is. When you are silent I am sleepless at night and a haggard wretch during the day. Young Mr Kirby, our Walking Gentleman, has been unwell, and the management has given me temporarily some of his business to play——"

AVONIA. Arthur Gower——!

TOM. Will you——? [*Reading*] "Last night I was allowed to appear as Careless in *The School for Scandal.* Miss Mason, the Lady Teazle, complimented me, but the men said I lacked vigour"—the old

cry!—"and so this morning I am greatly depressed. But I will still persevere, as long as you can assure me that no presuming fellow is paying attention to Miss Trelawny. Oh, how badly she treated me——!"

AVONIA [*following the reading of the letter*]. "How badly she treated me——!"

TOM. "I will never forgive her—only love her——"

AVONIA. "Only love her——"

TOM. "Only love her, and hope I may some day become a great actor, and, like herself, a gipsy. Yours very gratefully, Arthur Gordon."

AVONIA. In the Profession!

TOM. Bolted from Cavendish Square—went down to Bristol——

AVONIA. How did he manage it all? [TOM *taps his breast proudly.*] But isn't Rose to be told? why shouldn't she be told?

TOM. She has hurt the boy, stung him to the quick, and he's proud.

AVONIA. But she loves him now that she believes he has forgotten her. She only half loved him before. She loves him!

TOM. Serve her right.

AVONIA. Oh, Tom, is she never to know?

TOM [*folding the letter carefully*]. Some day, when he begins to make strides.

AVONIA. Strides! he's nothing but General Utility at present?

TOM [*putting the letter in his pocket*]. No.

AVONIA. And how long have you been that?

TOM. Ten years.

AVONIA [*with a little screech*]. Ah—h—h! she ought to be told!

TOM [*seizing her wrist*]. Woman, you won't——!

AVONIA [*raising her disengaged hand*]. By all my hopes of hitting 'em——!

TOM. All right, I believe you. [*Listening*] Sssh!

[*They rise and separate, he moving to the fire, she to the right, as* ROSE *enters.* ROSE *is now a grave, dignified, somewhat dreamy young woman.*

ROSE [*looking from* TOM *to* AVONIA]. Ah——?

TOM *and* AVONIA. Good morning.

ROSE [*kissing* AVONIA]. Visitors!

AVONIA. My fire's so black [*showing her irons*] I thought you wouldn't mind——

ROSE [*removing her gloves*]. Of course not. [*Seeing the table-cover*] Oh——!

TOM. Mrs Mossop asked me to bring that upstairs. It was in the Telfers' room, you know, and she fancied——

ROSE. How good of her! thanks, Tom. [*Taking off her hat and*

*mantle*] Poor Mr and Mrs Telfer! they still wander mournfully about the 'Wells'; they can get nothing to do.

[*Carrying her hat and umbrella, she disappears through the curtains.*

TOM [*to* AVONIA, *in a whisper, across the room*]. The Telfers——!

AVONIA. Eh?

TOM. She's been giving 'em money.

AVONIA. Yes.

TOM. Damn!

ROSE [*reappearing*]. What are you saying about me?

AVONIA. I was wondering whether you'd lend me that belt you bought for Ophelia; to wear during the first two or three weeks of the pantomime——

ROSE. Certainly, 'Vonia, to wear throughout——

AVONIA [*embracing her*]. No, it's too good; I'd rather fake one for the rest of the time. [*Looking into her face*] What's the matter?

ROSE. I will make you a present of the belt, 'Vonia, if you will accept it. I bought it when I came back to the 'Wells,' thinking everything would go on as before. But—it's of no use; they tell me I cannot act effectively any longer——

TOM [*indignantly*]. Effectively——!

ROSE. First, as you know, they reduce my salary——

TOM *and* AVONIA [*with clenched hands*]. Yes!

ROSE. And now, this morning—[*sitting*] you can guess——

AVONIA [*hoarsely*]. Got your notice?

ROSE. Yes.

TOM *and* AVONIA. Oh—h—h!

ROSE [*after a little pause*]. Poor Mother! I hope she doesn't see. [*Overwhelmed,* AVONIA *and* TOM *sit.*] I was running through Blanche, my old part in *The Pedlar of Marseilles*, when Mr Burroughs spoke to me. It is true I was doing it tamely, but—it is such nonsense.

TOM. Hear, hear!

ROSE. And then, that poor little song I used to sing on the bridge——

AVONIA [*singing, softly*]. "Ever of thee I'm fondly dreaming——"

TOM *and* AVONIA [*singing*]. "Thy gentle voice my spirit can cheer."

ROSE. I told Mr Burroughs I should cut it out. So ridiculously inappropriate!

TOM. And that—did it?

ROSE [*smiling at him*]. That did it.

AVONIA [*kneeling beside her, and embracing her tearfully*]. My ducky! oh, but there are other theatres besides the 'Wells'——

ROSE. For me? only where the same trash is acted.

AVONIA [*with a sob*]. But a few months ago you l—l—liked your work.

ROSE. Yes [*dreamily*], and then I went to Cavendish Square, engaged to Arthur—— [TOM *rises and leans upon the mantelpiece, looking into the fire.*] How badly I behaved in Cavendish Square! how unlike a young lady! What if the old folks *were* overbearing and tyrannical, Arthur could be gentle with them. "They have not many more years in this world," he said—dear boy!—"and anything we can do to make them happy——" And what *did* I do? *There* was a chance for me—to be patient, and womanly; and I proved to them that I was nothing but—an actress.

AVONIA [*rising, hurt but still tearful*]. It doesn't follow, because one is a——

ROSE [*rising*]. Yes, 'Vonia, it does! We are only dolls, partly human, with mechanical limbs that *will* fall into stagey postures, and heads stuffed with sayings out of rubbishy plays. It isn't *the* world we live in, merely *a* world—such a queer little one! I was less than a month in Cavendish Square, and very few people came there; but they were *real* people—*real*! For a month I lost the smell of gas and oranges, and the hurry and noise, and the dirt and the slang, and the clownish joking, at the 'Wells.' I didn't realize at the time the change that was going on in me; I didn't realize it till I came back. And then, by degrees, I discovered what had happened—— [TOM *is now near her. She takes his hand and drops her head upon* AVONIA'S *shoulder. Wearily*] Oh, Tom! oh, 'Vonia——! [*From the next room comes the sound of the throwing about of heavy objects, and of* GADD'S *voice uttering loud imprecations. Alarmed*] Oh——!

AVONIA [*listening attentively*]. Sounds like Ferdy. [*She goes to the centre door. At the keyhole*] Ferdy! ain't you well, darling?

GADD [*on the other side of the door*]. Avonia!

AVONIA. I'm in Miss Trelawny's room.

GADD. Ah——!

AVONIA [*to* ROSE *and* TOM]. Now, what's put Ferdy out? [GADD *enters with a wild look.*] Ferdinand!

TOM. Anything wrong, Gadd?

GADD. Wrong! wrong! [*Sitting*] What d'ye think?

AVONIA. Tell us!

GADD. I have been asked to appear in the pantomime.

AVONIA [*shocked*]. Oh, Ferdy! you!

GADD. I, a serious actor, if ever there was one; a poetic actor——!

AVONIA. What part, Ferdy?

GADD. The insult, the bitter insult! the gross indignity!

AVONIA. What part, Ferdy?

GADD. I have not been seen in pantomime for years, not since I shook the dust of the T. R. Stockton from my feet.

AVONIA. Ferdy, what part?

GADD. I simply looked at Burroughs, when he preferred his request, and swept from the theatre.

AVONIA. What part, Ferdy?

GADD. A part, too, which is seen for a moment at the opening of the pantomime, and not again till its close.

AVONIA. Ferdy.

GADD. Eh?

AVONIA. What part?

GADD. A character called the Demon of Discontent.

[ROSE *turns away to the fireplace;* TOM *curls himself up on the sofa and is seen to shake with laughter.*

AVONIA [*walking about indignantly*]. Oh! [*Returning to* GADD] Oh, it's a rotten part! Rose dear, I assure you, as artist to artist, that part is absolutely rotten. [*To* GADD] You won't play it, darling?

GADD [*rising*]. Play it! I would see the 'Wells' in ashes first.

AVONIA. We shall lose our engagements, Ferdy. I know Burroughs; we shall be out, both of us.

GADD. Of course we shall. D'ye think I have not counted the cost?

AVONIA [*putting her hand in his*]. I don't mind, dear—for the sake of your position—[*struck by a sudden thought*] oh——!

GADD. What——?

AVONIA. There now—we haven't put by!

[*There is a knock at the door.*

ROSE. Who is that?

COLPOYS [*outside the door*]. Is Gadd here, Miss Trelawny?

ROSE. Yes.

COLPOYS. I want to see him.

GADD. Wrench, I'll trouble you. Ask Mr Colpoys whether he approaches me as a friend, an acquaintance, or in his capacity of stage manager at the 'Wells'—the tool of Burroughs.

[TOM *opens the door slightly.* GADD *and* AVONIA *join* ROSE *at the fireplace.*

TOM [*at the door, solemnly*]. Colpoys, are you here as Gadd's bosom friend, or as a mere tool of Burroughs?

[*An inaudible colloquy follows between* TOM *and* COLPOYS. TOM'S *head is outside the door; his legs are seen to move convulsively, and the sound of suppressed laughter is heard.*

GADD [*turning*]. Well, well?

TOM [*closing the door sharply, and facing* GADD *with great seriousness*]. He is here as the tool of Burroughs.

GADD. I will receive him.

[TOM *admits* COLPOYS, *who carries a mean-looking 'part,' and a letter.*

COLPOYS [*after formally bowing to the ladies*]. Oh, Gadd, Mr Burroughs instructs me to offer you this part in the pantomime [*Handing the part to* GADD] Demon of Discontent.

[GADD *takes the part and flings it to the ground;* AVONIA *picks it up and reads it.*

COLPOYS. You refuse it?

GADD. I do. [*With dignity*] Acquaint Mr Burroughs with my decision, and add that I hope his pantomime will prove an utterly mirthless one. May Boxing Night, to those unfortunate enough to find themselves in the theatre, long remain a dismal memory; and may succeeding audiences, scanty and dissatisfied——! [COLPOYS *presents* GADD *with the letter.* GADD *opens it and reads.*] I leave. [*Sitting*] The Romeo, the Orlando, the Clifford—leaves!

AVONIA [*coming to* GADD, *indicating some lines in the part*]. Ferdy, this ain't so bad.

[*Reading*] "I'm Discontent! from Orkney's isle to Dover
To make men's bile bile-over I endover——"

GADD. 'Vonia! [*Taking the part from* AVONIA, *with mingled surprise and pleasure*] Ho, ho! no, that's not bad.

[*Reading*] "Tempers, though sweet, I whip up to a lather,
Make wives hate husbands, sons wish fathers farther."

'Vonia, there's something to lay hold of here! I'll think this over. [*Rising, addressing* COLPOYS] Gus, I have thought this over. I play it.

[*They all gather round him, and congratulate him.* AVONIA *embraces and kisses him.*

TOM *and* COLPOYS. That's right!

ROSE. I'm very pleased, Ferdinand.

AVONIA [*tearfully*]. Oh, Ferdy!

GADD [*in high spirits*]. Egad, I play it! Gus, I'll stroll back with you to the 'Wells.' [*Shaking hands with* ROSE] Miss Trelawny——! [AVONIA *accompanies* COLPOYS *and* GADD *to the door, clinging to* GADD, *who is flourishing the part.*] 'Vonia, I see myself in this! [*Kissing her*] Steak for dinner!

[GADD *and* COLPOYS *go out.* TOM *shrieks with laughter.*

AVONIA [*turning upon him, angrily and volubly*]. Yes, I heard you with Colpoys outside that door, if Gadd didn't. It's a pity, Mr Wrench, you can't find something better to do——!

ROSE [*pacifically*]. Hush, hush, 'Vonia! Tom, assist me with my basket; I'll give 'Vonia her belt——

[TOM *and* ROSE *go behind the curtains and presently emerge, carrying the dress-basket, which they deposit near the sofa.*

AVONIA [*flouncing across the room*]. Making fun of Gadd! an artist to the roots of his hair! There's more talent in Gadd's little finger——!

ROSE [*rummaging among the contents of the basket*]. 'Vonia, 'Vonia!

AVONIA. And if Gadd *is* to play a demon in the pantomime, what do *you* figure as, Tom Wrench, among half a dozen other things? Why, as part of a dragon? Yes, and *which end*——?

ROSE [*quietly to* TOM]. Apologize to 'Vonia at once, Tom.

TOM [*meekly*]. Mrs Gadd, I beg your pardon.

AVONIA [*coming to him and kissing him*]. Granted, Tom; but you should be a little more considerate——

ROSE [*holding up the belt*]. Here——!

AVONIA [*taking the belt, ecstatically*]. Oh, isn't it lovely! Rose, you dear! you sweet thing! [*Singing a few bars of the Jewel Song from "Faust," then rushing at* ROSE *and embracing her.*] I'm going to try my dress on, to show Mrs Burroughs. Come and help me into it. I'll unlock my door on my side—— [TOM *politely opens the door for her to pass out.*] Thank you, Tom—[*kissing him again*] only you should be more considerate toward Gadd—— [*She disappears.*

TOM [*calling after her*]. I will be; I will—— [*Shutting the door*] Ha, ha, ha!

ROSE [*smiling*]. Hush! poor 'Vonia! [*Mending the fire*] Excuse me, Tom—have you a fire upstairs, in your room, to-day?

TOM. Er—n—not to-day—it's Saturday. I never have a fire on a Saturday.

ROSE [*coming to him*]. Why not?

TOM [*looking away from her*]. Don't know—creatures of habit——

ROSE [*gently touching his coat-sleeve*]. Because if you would like to smoke your pipe by my fire while I'm with 'Vonia——

[*The key is heard to turn in the lock of the door of the further room.*

AVONIA [*from the further room*]. It's unlocked.

ROSE. I'm coming.

[*She unbolts the door on her side, and goes into* AVONIA'S *room, shutting the door behind her. The lid of the dress-basket is open, showing the contents; a pair of little satin shoes lie at the top.* TOM *takes up one of the shoes and presses it to his lips. There is a knock at the door on the right. He returns the shoe to the basket, closes the lid, and walks away.*

TOM. Yes? [*The door opens slightly and* IMOGEN *is heard.*

IMOGEN [*outside*]. Is that you, Wrench?

TOM. Hullo! [IMOGEN, *in out-of-door costume, enters breathlessly.*

IMOGEN [*closing the door—speaking rapidly and excitedly*]. Mossop said you were in Rose's room——

TOM [*shaking hands with her*]. She'll be here in a few minutes.

IMOGEN. It's you I want. Let me sit down.

TOM [*going to the armchair*]. Here——

IMOGEN [*sitting on the right of the table, panting*]. Not near the fire——

TOM. What's up?

IMOGEN. Oh, Wrench! p'r'aps my fortune's made!

TOM [*quite calmly*]. Congratulate you, Jenny.

IMOGEN. Do be quiet; don't make such a racket. You see, things haven't been going at all satisfactorily at the Olympic lately. There's Miss Puddifant——

TOM. I know—no lady.

IMOGEN. *How* do you know?

TOM. Guessed.

IMOGEN. Quite right; and a thousand other annoyances. And at last I took it into my head to consult Mr Clandon, who married an aunt of mine and lives at Streatham, and he'll lend me five hundred pounds

TOM. What for?

IMOGEN. Towards taking a theatre.

TOM [*dubiously*]. Five hundred——

IMOGEN. It's all he's good for, and he won't advance that unless I can get a further five, or eight, hundred from some other quarter.

TOM. What theatre!

IMOGEN. The Pantheon happens to be empty.

TOM. Yes; it's been that for the last twenty years.

IMOGEN. Don't throw wet blankets—I mean—[*referring to her tablets, which she carries in her muff*] I've got it all worked out in black and white. There's a deposit required on account of rent—two hundred pounds. Cleaning the theatre—[*looking at* TOM] what do *you* say?

TOM. Cleaning *that* theatre?

IMOGEN. I say, another two hundred.

TOM. That would remove the top layer——

IMOGEN. Cost of producing the opening play, five hundred pounds. Balance for emergencies, three hundred. You generally have a balance for emergencies.

TOM. You generally have the emergencies, if not the balance!

IMOGEN. Now, the question is, will five hundred produce the play?

TOM. What play?

IMOGEN. Your play.

TOM [*quietly*]. My——

IMOGEN. Your comedy.

TOM [*turning to the fire—in a low voice*]. Rubbish!

IMOGEN. Well, Mr Clandon thinks it *isn't*. [*He faces her sharply.*] I gave it to him to read, and he—well, he's quite taken with it.

TOM [*walking about, his hands in his pockets, his head down, agitatedly*]. Clandon—Landon—what's his name——?

IMOGEN. Tony Clandon—Anthony Clandon——

TOM [*choking*]. He's a—he's a——

IMOGEN. He's a hop-merchant.

TOM. No, he's not—[*sitting on the sofa, leaning his head on his hands*] he's a stunner.

IMOGEN [*rising*]. So you grasp the position. Theatre—manageress—author—play, found; and eight hundred pounds *wanted*!

TOM [*rising*]. Oh, Lord!

IMOGEN. Who's got it?

TOM [*wildly*]. The Queen's got it! Miss Burdett-Coutts has got it!

IMOGEN. Don't be a fool, Wrench. Do you remember old Mr Morfew, of Duncan Terrace? He used to take great interest in us all at the 'Wells.' *He* has money.

TOM. He has gout; we don't see him now.

IMOGEN. Gout! How lucky! That means he's at home. Will you run round to Duncan Terrace——?

TOM [*looking down at his clothes*]. I!

IMOGEN. Nonsense, Wrench; we're not asking him to advance money on your clothes.

TOM. The clothes are the man, Jenny.

IMOGEN. And the woman——?

TOM. The face is the woman; there's the real inequality of the sexes.

IMOGEN. I'll go! Is my face good enough?

TOM [*enthusiastically*] I should say so!

IMOGEN [*taking his hands*]. Ha, ha! It has been in my possession longer than you have had your oldest coat, Tom!

TOM. Make haste, Jenny!

IMOGEN [*running up to the door*]. Oh, it will last till I get to Duncan Terrace. [*Turning*] Tom, you may have to read your play to Mr Morfew. Have you another copy? Uncle Clandon has mine.

TOM [*holding his head*]. I think I have—I don't know——

IMOGEN. Look for it! Find it! If Morfew wants to hear it, we must strike while the iron's hot.

TOM. While the gold's hot!

IMOGEN *and* TOM. Ha, ha, ha!

[MRS MOSSOP *enters, showing some signs of excitement.*

IMOGEN [*pushing her aside*]. Oh, get out of the way, Mrs Mossop——

[IMOGEN *departs.*

MRS MOSSOP. Upon my——! [*To* TOM] A visitor for Miss Trelawny! Where's Miss Trelawny?

TOM. With Mrs Gadd. Mossop!

MRS MOSSOP. Don't bother me now——

TOM. Mossop! The apartments vacated by the Telfers! Dare to let 'em without giving me the preference.

MRS MOSSOP. You!

TOM [*seizing her hands and swinging her round*]. I may be wealthy, sweet Rebecca! [*Embracing her*] I may be rich and honoured!

MRS MOSSOP. Oh, have done! [*Releasing herself*] My lodgers do take such liberties——

TOM [*at the door, grandly*]. Beccy, half a scuttle of coal, to start with.

[*He goes out, leaving the door slightly open.*

MRS MOSSOP [*knocking at the door of the further room*]. Miss Trelawny, my dear! Miss Trelawny! [*The door opens, a few inches.*

ROSE [*looking out*]. Why, what a clatter you and Mr Wrench have been making——!

MRS MOSSOP [*beckoning her mysteriously*]. Come here, dear.

ROSE [*closing the door and entering the room wonderingly*]. Eh?

MRS MOSSOP [*in awe*]. Sir William Gower!

ROSE. Sir William!

MRS MOSSOP. Don't be vexed with me. "I'll see if she's at home," I said. "Oh, yes, woman, Miss Trelawny's at home," said he, and hobbled straight in. I've shut him in the Telfers' room——

[*There are three distinct raps, with a stick, at the right-hand door.*

ROSE *and* MRS MOSSOP. Oh—h!

ROSE [*faintly*]. Open it.

[MRS MOSSOP *opens the door, and* SIR WILLIAM *enters. He is feebler, more decrepit, than when last seen He wears a plaid about his shoulders and walks with the aid of a stick.*

MRS MOSSOP [*at the door*]. Ah, and a sweet thing Miss Trelawny is——!

SIR WILLIAM [*turning to her*]. Are you a relative?

MRS MOSSOP. No, I am *not* a relative——!

SIR WILLIAM. Go. [*She departs; he closes the door with the end of his stick. Facing* ROSE] My mind is not commonly a wavering one, Miss Trelawny, but it has taken me some time—months—to decide upon calling on ye.

ROSE. Won't you sit down?

SIR WILLIAM [*after a pause of hesitation, sitting upon the dress-basket*]. Ugh!

ROSE [*with quiet dignity*]. Have we no chairs? Do we lack chairs here, Sir William?

[*He gives her a quick, keen look, then rises and walks to the fire.*

SIR WILLIAM [*suddenly, bringing his stick down upon the table with violence*]. My grandson! my grandson! where is he?

ROSE. Arthur——?

SIR WILLIAM. I had but one.

ROSE. Isn't he—in Cavendish Square——?

SIR WILLIAM. Isn't he in Cavendish Square! no, he is not in Cavendish Square, as you know well.

ROSE. Oh, I don't know——

SIR WILLIAM. Tsch!

ROSE. When did he leave you?

SIR WILLIAM. Tsch!

ROSE. When?

SIR WILLIAM. He made his escape during the night, 22nd of August last—[*pointing his finger at her*] as you know well.

ROSE. Sir William, I assure you——

SIR WILLIAM. Tsch! [*Taking off his gloves*] How often does he write to ye?

ROSE. He does not write to me. He did write day after day, two or three times a day, for about a week. That was in June, when I came back here. [*With drooping head*] He never writes now.

SIR WILLIAM. Visits ye——?

ROSE. No.

SIR WILLIAM. Comes troubadouring——?

ROSE. No, no, no. I have not seen him since that night I refused to see him—— [*With a catch in her breath*] Why, he may be——!

SIR WILLIAM [*fumbling in his pocket*]. Ah, but he's not. He's alive; [*producing a small packet of letters*] Arthur's alive, [*advancing to her*] and full of his tricks still. His great-aunt Trafalgar receives a letter from him once a fortnight, posted in London——

ROSE [*holding out her hand for the letters*]. Oh!

SIR WILLIAM [*putting them behind his back*]. Hey!

ROSE [*faintly*]. I thought you wished me to read them. [*He yields them to her grudgingly, she taking his hand and bending over it.*] Ah, thank you.

SIR WILLIAM [*withdrawing his hand with a look of disrelish*]. What are ye doing, madam? what are ye doing?

[*He sits, producing his snuff-box; she sits, upon the basket, facing him, and opens the packet of letters.*

ROSE [*reading a letter*]. "To reassure you as to my well-being, I cause this to be posted in London by a friend——"

SIR WILLIAM [*pointing a finger at her again, accusingly*]. A friend!

ROSE [*looking up, with simple pride*]. He would never call me *that*. [*Reading*] "I am in good bodily health, and as contented as a man can be who has lost the woman he loves, and will love till his dying day——" Ah——!

SIR WILLIAM. Read no more! Return them to me! give them to me, ma'am! [*Rising, she restores the letters, meekly. He peers up into her face.*] What's come to ye? You are not so much of a vixen as you were.

ROSE [*shaking her head*]. No.

SIR WILLIAM [*suspiciously*]. Less of the devil——?

ROSE. Sir William, I am sorry for having been a vixen, and for all my unruly conduct, in Cavendish Square. I humbly beg your, and Miss Gower's, forgiveness.

SIR WILLIAM [*taking snuff, uncomfortably*]. Pi—i—i—sh! extraordinary change.

ROSE. Aren't *you* changed, Sir William, now that you have lost him?

SIR WILLIAM. I?

ROSE. Don't you love him now, the more? [*His head droops a little, and his hands wander to the brooch which secures his plaid.*] Let me take your shawl from you. You would catch cold when you go out——

[*He allows her to remove the plaid, protesting during the process.*

SIR WILLIAM. I'll not trouble ye, ma'am. Much obleeged to ye, but I'll not trouble ye. [*Rising*] I'll not trouble ye—— [*He walks to the fireplace. She folds the plaid and lays it upon the sofa. He looks round—speaking in an altered tone.*] My dear, gipsying doesn't seem to be such a good trade with ye, as it used to be by all accounts——

[*The door of the further room opens and* AVONIA *enters boldly, in the dress of a burlesque prince—cotton-velvet shirt, edged with bullion trimming, a cap, white tights, ankle boots, etc.*

AVONIA [*unconsciously*]. How's this, Rose——?

SIR WILLIAM. Ah—h—h—h!

ROSE. Oh, go away, 'Vonia!

AVONIA. Sir Gower! [*To* SIR WILLIAM] Good morning.

[*She withdraws.*

SIR WILLIAM [*pacing the room—again very violent*]. Yes! and these are the associates you would have tempted my boy—my grandson—to herd with! [*Flourishing his stick*] Ah—h—h—h!

ROSE [*sitting upon the basket—weakly*]. That young lady doesn't live in that attire. She is preparing for the pantomime——

SIR WILLIAM [*standing over her*]. And now he's gone; lured away, I suspect, by one of ye—[*pointing to the door of Avonia's room*] by one of these harridans!—— [AVONIA *reappears defiantly.*

AVONIA. Look here, Sir Gower——

ROSE [*rising*]. Go, 'Vonia!

AVONIA [*to* SIR WILLIAM]. We've met before, if you remember, in Cavendish Square——

ROSE [*sitting again, helplessly*]. Oh, Mrs Gadd——!

SIR WILLIAM. Mistress! a married lady!

AVONIA. Yes, I spent some of my honeymoon at your house——

SIR WILLIAM. What!

AVONIA. Excuse my dress; it's all in the way of my business. Just one word about Rose.

ROSE. Please, 'Vonia——!

AVONIA [*to* SIR WILLIAM, *who is glaring at her in horror*]. Now, there's nothing to stare at, Sir Gower. If you must look anywhere in particular, look at that poor thing. A nice predicament you've brought her to!

SIR WILLIAM. Sir——! [*Correcting himself*] Madam!

AVONIA. You've brought her to beggary, amongst you. You've broken her heart; and, what's worse, you've made her genteel. She can't act since she left your mansion; she can only mope about the stage with her eyes fixed like a person in a dream—dreaming of him, I suppose, and of what it is to be a lady. And first she's put upon half-salary; and then, to-day, she gets the sack—the entire sack, Sir Gower! So there's nothing left for her but to starve, or to make artificial flowers. Miss Trelawny I'm speaking of! [*Going to* ROSE, *and embracing her*] Our Rose! our Trelawny! [*To* ROSE, *breaking down*] Excuse me for interfering, ducky. [*Retiring, in tears*] Good day, Sir Gower. [*She goes out.*

SIR WILLIAM [*after a pause, to* ROSE]. Is this—the case?

ROSE [*standing, and speaking in a low voice*]. Yes. As you have noticed, fortune has turned against me, rather.

SIR WILLIAM [*penitently*]. I—I'm sorry, ma'am. I—I believe ye've kept your word to us concerning Arthur. I—I——

ROSE [*not heeding him, looking before her, dreamily*]. My mother knew how fickle fortune could be to us gipsies. One of the greatest actors that ever lived warned her of that——

SIR WILLIAM. Miss Gower will also feel extremely—extremely——

ROSE. Kean once warned Mother of that.

SIR WILLIAM [*in an altered tone*]. Kean? which Kean?

ROSE. Edmund Kean. My mother acted with Edmund Kean when she was a girl.

SIR WILLIAM [*approaching her slowly, speaking in a queer voice*]. With Kean? with Kean!

ROSE. Yes.

SIR WILLIAM [*at her side, in a whisper*]. My dear, I—*I've* seen Edmund Kean.

ROSE. Yes?

SIR WILLIAM. A young man then, I was; quite different from the man I am now—impulsive, excitable. Kean! [*Drawing a deep breath*] Ah, he was a *splendid* gipsy!

ROSE [*looking down at the dress-basket*]. I've a little fillet in there that my mother wore as Cordelia to Kean's Lear——

SIR WILLIAM. I may have seen your mother also. I was somewhat different in those days——

ROSE [*kneeling at the basket and opening it*]. And the Order and chain, and the sword, he wore in *Richard*. He gave them to my father; I've always prized them. [*She drags to the surface a chain with an Order*

*attached to it, and a sword-belt and sword—all very theatrical and tawdry —and a little gold fillet. She hands him the chain.*] That's the Order.

SIR WILLIAM [*handling it tenderly*]. Kean! God bless me!

ROSE [*holding up the fillet*]. My poor mother's fillet.

SIR WILLIAM [*looking at it*]. I may have seen her. [*Thoughtfully*] I was a young man then. [*Looking at* ROSE *steadily*] Put it on, my dear.

[*She goes to the mirror and puts on the fillet.*

SIR WILLIAM [*examining the Order*]. Lord bless us! how he stirred me! how he——!

[*He puts the chain over his shoulders.* ROSE *turns to him.*

ROSE [*advancing to him*]. There!

SIR WILLIAM [*looking at her*]. Cordelia! Cordelia—with Kean!

ROSE [*adjusting the chain upon him*]. This should hang so. [*Returning to the basket, and taking up the sword-belt and sword*] Look!

SIR WILLIAM [*handling them*]. Kean! [*To her, in a whisper*] I'll tell ye! I'll tell ye! when I saw him as Richard—I was young and a fool—I'll tell ye—he almost fired me with an ambition to—to—— [*Fumbling with the belt*] How did he carry this?

ROSE [*fastening the belt, with the sword, round him*]. In this way——

SIR WILLIAM. Ah! [*He paces the stage, growling and muttering, and walking with a limp and one shoulder hunched. She watches him, seriously.*] Ah! he was a little man too! I remember him! as if it were last night! I remember—— [*Pausing and looking at her fixedly*] My dear, your prospects in life have been injured by your unhappy acquaintanceship with my grandson.

ROSE [*gazing into the fire*]. Poor Arthur's prospects in life—what of them?

SIR WILLIAM [*testily*]. Tsch, tsch, tsch!

ROSE. If I knew where he is——!

SIR WILLIAM. Miss Trelawny, if you cannot act, you cannot earn your living.

ROSE. How is he earning *his* living?

SIR WILLIAM. And if you cannot earn your living, you must be provided for.

ROSE [*turning to him*]. Provided for?

SIR WILLIAM. Miss Gower was kind enough to bring me here in a cab. She and I will discuss plans for making provision for ye while driving home.

ROSE [*advancing to him*]. Oh, I beg you will do no such thing, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. Hey!

ROSE. I could not accept any help from you or Miss Gower.

SIR WILLIAM. You must! you shall!

ROSE. I will not.

SIR WILLIAM [*touching the Order and the sword*]. Ah!—yes, I—I'll buy these of ye, my dear——

ROSE. Oh, no, no! not for hundreds of pounds! please take them off! [*There is a hurried knocking at the door.*

SIR WILLIAM [*startled*]. Who's that? [*Struggling with the chain and belt*] Remove these——!

[*The handle is heard to rattle.* SIR WILLIAM *disappears behind the curtains.* IMOGEN *opens the door and looks in.*

IMOGEN [*seeing only* ROSE, *and coming to her and embracing her*]. Rose darling, where is Tom Wrench?

ROSE. He was here not long since——

IMOGEN [*going to the door and calling, desperately*]. Tom! Tom Wrench! Mr Wrench!

ROSE. Is anything amiss?

IMOGEN [*shrilly*]. Tom!

ROSE. Imogen!

IMOGEN [*returning to* ROSE]. Oh, my dear, forgive my agitation——! [TOM *enters, buoyantly, flourishing the manuscript of his play.*

TOM. I've found it! at the bottom of a box—"deeper than did ever plummet sound——!" [*To* IMOGEN] Eh? what's the matter?

IMOGEN. Oh, Tom, old Mr Morfew——!

TOM [*blankly*]. Isn't he willing——?

IMOGEN [*with a gesture of despair*]. I don't know. He's dead.

TOM. No!

IMOGEN. Three weeks ago. Oh, what a chance he has missed! [TOM *bangs his manuscript down upon the table savagely.*

ROSE. What is it, Tom? Imogen, what is it?

IMOGEN [*pacing the room*]. I can think of no one else——

TOM. Done again!

IMOGEN. We shall lose it, of course——

ROSE. Lose what?

TOM. The opportunity—her opportunity, *my* opportunity, *your* opportunity, Rose.

ROSE [*coming to him*]. *My* opportunity, Tom?

TOM [*pointing to the manuscript*]. My play—my comedy—my youngest born! Jenny has a theatre—could have one—has five hundred towards it, put down by a man who believes in my comedy, God bless him!—the only fellow who has ever believed——?

ROSE. Oh, Tom! [*turning to* IMOGEN] oh, Imogen!

IMOGEN. My dear, five hundred! we want another five, at least.

ROSE. Another five!

IMOGEN. Or eight.

TOM. And you are to play the part of Dora. Isn't she, Jenny—I mean, wasn't she?

IMOGEN. Certainly. Just the sort of simple little miss you *could* play now, Rose. And we thought that old Mr Morfew would help us in the speculation. Speculation! it's a dead certainty!

TOM. *Dead* certainty? poor Morfew!

IMOGEN. And here we are, stuck fast——!

TOM [*sitting upon the dress-basket dejectedly*]. And they'll expect me to rehearse that dragon to-morrow with enthusiasm.

ROSE [*putting her arm around his shoulder*]. Never mind, Tom.

TOM. No, I won't—— [*Taking her hand*] Oh, Rose——! [*Looking up at her*] Oh, Dora——!

[SIR WILLIAM, *divested of his theatrical trappings, comes from behind the curtain.*

IMOGEN. Oh——!

TOM [*rising*]. Eh?

ROSE [*retreating*]. Sir William Gower, Tom——

SIR WILLIAM [*to* TOM]. I had no wish to be disturbed, sir, and I withdrew [*bowing to* IMOGEN] when that lady entered the room. I have been a party, it appears, to a consultation upon a matter of business. [*To* TOM] Do I understand, sir, that you have been defeated in some project which would have served the interests of Miss Trelawny?

TOM. Y—y—yes, sir.

SIR WILLIAM. Mr Wicks——

TOM. Wrench——

SIR WILLIAM. Tsch! Sir, it would give me pleasure—it would give my grandson, Mr Arthur Gower, pleasure—to be able to aid Miss Trelawny at the present moment.

TOM. S—s—sir William, w—w—would you like to hear my play——?

SIR WILLIAM [*sharply*]. Hey! [*Looking round*] Ho, ho!

TOM. My comedy?

SIR WILLIAM [*cunningly*]. So ye think I might be induced to fill the office ye designed for the late Mr—Mr——

IMOGEN. Morfew.

SIR WILLIAM. Morfew, eh?

TOM. N—n—no, sir.

SIR WILLIAM. No! no!

IMOGEN [*shrilly*]. Yes!

SIR WILLIAM [*after a short pause, quietly*]. Read your play, sir. [*Pointing to a chair at the table*] Sit down. [*To* ROSE *and* IMOGEN] Sit down.

[TOM *goes to the chair indicated.* MISS GOWER'S *voice is heard outside the door.*

MISS GOWER [*outside*]. William! [ROSE *opens the door;* MISS GOWER *enters.*] Oh, William, what has become of you? has anything dreadful happened?

SIR WILLIAM. Sit down, Trafalgar. This gentleman is about to read a comedy. A cheer! [*Testily*] Are there no cheers here! [ROSE *brings a chair and places it for* MISS GOWER *beside* SIR WILLIAM'S *chair.*] Sit down.

MISS GOWER [*sitting bewildered*]. William, is all this—quite——?

SIR WILLIAM [*sitting*]. Yes, Trafalgar, quite in place—quite in place——

[IMOGEN *sits as* COLPOYS *and* GADD *swagger in at the door,* COLPOYS *smoking a pipe,* GADD *a large cigar.*

SIR WILLIAM [*to* TOM, *referring to* GADD *and* COLPOYS]. Friends of yours?

TOM. Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM [*to* GADD *and* COLPOYS]. Sit down. [*Imperatively*] Sit down and be silent.

[GADD *and* COLPOYS *seat themselves upon the sofa, like men in a dream.* ROSE *sits on the dress-basket.*

AVONIA [*opening her door slightly—in an anxious voice*]. Rose——!

SIR WILLIAM. Come in, ma'am, come in! [AVONIA—*still in her pantomime dress—enters, coming to* ROSE.] Sit down, ma'am, and be silent! [AVONIA *sits beside* ROSE, *next to* MISS GOWER.

MISS GOWER [*in horror*]. Oh—h—h—h!

SIR WILLIAM [*restraining her*]. Quite in place, Trafalgar quite in place. [*To* TOM] Now, sir!

TOM [*opening his manuscript and reading*]. "*Life, a Comedy,* by Thomas Wrench——"

# THE FOURTH ACT

*The scene represents the stage of a theatre, with the proscenium arch and the dark and empty auditorium in the distance. The stage extends a few feet beyond the line of the proscenium, and is terminated by a row of old-fashioned footlights with metal reflectors. In the wall on the left is an open doorway supposed to admit to the green room. Right and left of the stage are the "P." and "O. P." and the first and second entrances, with wings running in grooves, according to the old fashion. Against the walls are some 'flats.' Just below the footlights is a T-light, burning gas, and below this the prompt-table. On the right of the prompt-table is a chair, and on the left another. Against the edge of the proscenium arch is another chair; and nearer, on the right, stands a large throne-chair, with a gilt frame and red velvet seat, now much dilapidated. On the left, in the 'second entrance,' there are a 'property' stool, a table, and a chair, all of a similar style to the throne-chair and in like condition; and in the centre, as if placed there for the purpose of rehearsal, are a small circular table and a chair. On this table is a work-basket containing a ball of wool and a pair of knitting-needles; and on the prompt-table there is a book. A faded and ragged green baize covers the floor of the stage.*

*The wings, and the flats and borders, suggest by their appearance a theatre fallen somewhat into decay. The light is a dismal one, but it is relieved by a shaft of sunlight entering through a window in the flies on the right.*

MRS TELFER *is seated upon the throne-chair, in an attitude of dejection* TELFER *enters from the green room.*

TELFER [*coming to her*]. Is that you, Violet?

MRS TELFER. Is the reading over?

TELFER. Almost. My part is confined to the latter 'alf of the second act; so being close to the green room door, [*with a sigh*] I stole away.

MRS TELFER. It affords you no opportunity, James?

TELFER [*shaking his head*]. A mere fragment.

MRS TELFER [*rising*]. Well, but a few good speeches to a man of your stamp——

TELFER. Yes, but this is so line-y, Violet; so very line-y. And what d'ye think the character is described as?

MRS TELFER. What?

TELFER. "An old, stagey, out-of-date actor."

[*They stand looking at each other for a moment, silently.*

MRS TELFER [*falteringly*]. Will you—be able—to get near it, James?

TELFER [*looking away from her*]. I dare say——

MRS TELFER [*laying a hand upon his shoulder*]. That's all right, then.

TELFER. And you—what have they called you for, if you're not in the play? They 'ave not dared to suggest understudy?

MRS TELFER [*playing with her fingers*]. They don't ask me to act at all, James.

TELFER. Don't ask you——!

MRS TELFER. Miss Parrott offers me the position of Wardrobe-mistress.

TELFER. Violet——!

MRS TELFER. Hush!

TELFER. Let us both go home.

MRS TELFER [*restraining him*]. No, let us remain. We've been idle six months, and I can't bear to see you without your watch and all your comforts about you.

TELFER [*pointing toward the green room*]. And so this new-fangled stuff, and these dandified people, are to push us, and such as us, from our stools!

MRS TELFER. Yes, James, just as some other new fashion will, in course of time, push *them* from their stools.

[*From the green room comes the sound of a slight clapping of hands, followed by a murmur of voices. The* TELFERS *move away.* IMOGEN, *elaborately dressed, enters from the green room and goes leisurely to the prompt-table. She is followed by* TOM, *manuscript in hand, smarter than usual in appearance; and he by* O'DWYER—*an excitable Irishman of about forty, with an extravagant head of hair—who carries a small bundle of 'parts' in brown-paper covers.* TOM *and* O'DWYER *join* IMOGEN.

O'DWYER [*to* TOM]. Mr Wrench, I congratulate ye; I have that honour, sir. Your piece will do, sir; it will take the town, mark me.

TOM. Thank you, O'Dwyer.

IMOGEN. Look at the sunshine! there's a good omen, at any rate.

O'DWYER. Oh, sunshine's nothing. [*To* TOM] But did ye observe the gloom on their faces whilst ye were readin'?

IMOGEN [*anxiously*]. Yes, they did look glum.

O'DWYER. Glum! it might have been a funeral! There's a healthy prognostication for ye, if ye loike! it's infallible.

[*A keen-faced gentleman and a lady enter, from the green room, and stroll across the stage to the right, where they lean against the wings and talk. Then two young gentlemen enter, and* ROSE *follows.*

*Note.—The actors and the actress appearing for the first*

*time in this act, as members of the Pantheon Company, are outwardly greatly superior to the* GADDS, *the* TELFERS, *and* COLPOYS.

ROSE [*shaking hands with* TELFER]. Why didn't you sit near me, Mr Telfer? [*Going to* MRS TELFER] Fancy our being together again, and at the West End! [*To* TELFER] Do you like the play?

TELFER. Like it! there's not a speech in it, my dear—not a real *speech*; nothing to dig your teeth into——

O'DWYER [*allotting the parts, under the direction of* TOM *and* IMOGEN]. Mr Mortimer! [*One of the young gentlemen advances and receives his part from* O'DWYER, *and retires, reading it.*] Mr Denzil!

[*The keen-faced gentleman takes his part, then joins* IMOGEN *on her left and talks to her. The lady now has something to say to the solitary young gentleman.*

TOM [*to* O'DWYER, *quietly, handing him a part*]. Miss Brewster.

O'DWYER [*beckoning to the lady, who does not observe him, her back being towards him*]. Come here, my love.

TOM [*to* O'DWYER]. No, no, O'Dwyer—not your 'love.'

O'DWYER [*perplexed*]. Not?

TOM. No.

O'DWYER. No?

TOM. Why, you are meeting her this morning for the first time.

O'DWYER. That's true enough. [*Approaching the lady and handing her the part*] Miss Brewster.

THE LADY. Much obliged.

O'DWYER [*quietly to her*]. It'll fit ye like a glove, darlin'.

[*The lady sits, conning her part.* O'DWYER *returns to the table.*

TELFER [*to* ROSE]. Your lover in the play? which of these young sparks plays your lover—Harold or Gerald——?

ROSE. Gerald. I don't know. There are some people not here to-day, I believe.

O'DWYER. Mr Hunston!

[*The second young gentleman advances, receives his part, and joins the other young gentleman in the wings.*

ROSE. Not that young man, I hope. Isn't he a little bandy?

TELFER. One of the finest Macduffs I ever fought with was bow-legged.

O'DWYER. Mr Kelfer.

TOM [*to* O'DWYER]. No, no—Telfer.

O'DWYER. Telfer.

[TELFER *draws himself erect, puts his hand in his breast, but otherwise remains stationary.*

MRS TELFER [*anxiously*]. That's you, James.

O'DWYER. Come on, Mr Telfer! look alive, sir!

TOM [*to* O'DWYER]. Sssh, sssh, sssh! don't, don't——! [TELFER *advances to the prompt-table, slowly. He receives his part from* O'DWYER. *To* TELFER, *awkwardly*] I—I hope the little part of Poggs appeals to you, Mr Telfer. Only a sketch, of course; but there was nothing else —quite—in your——

TELFER. Nothing? to whose share does the Earl fall?

TOM. Oh, Mr Denzil plays Lord Parracourt.

TELFER. Denzil? I've never 'eard of 'im. Will you get to me to-day?

TOM. We—we expect to do so.

TELFER. Very well. [*Stiffly*] Let me be called in the street.

[*He stalks away.*

MRS TELFER [*relieved*]. Thank heaven! I was afraid James would break out.

ROSE [*to* MRS TELFER]. But you, dear Mrs Telfer—you weren't at the reading—what are *you* cast for?

MRS TELFER. I? [*Wiping away a tear*] I am the Wardrobe-mistress of this theatre.

ROSE. You! [*Embracing her*] Oh! oh!

MRS TELFER [*composing herself*]. Miss Trelawny—Rose—my child, if we are set to scrub a floor—and we may come to that yet—let us make up our minds to scrub it legitimately—with dignity——

[*She disappears and is seen no more.*

O'DWYER. Miss Trelawny! come here, my de——

TOM [*to* O'DWYER]. Hush!

O'DWYER. Miss Trelawny!

[ROSE *receives her part from* O'DWYER *and, after a word or two with* TOM *and* IMOGEN, *joins the two young gentlemen who are in the 'second entrance' on the left. The lady, who has been seated, now rises and crosses to the left, where she meets the keen-faced gentleman, who has finished his conversation with* IMOGEN.

THE LADY [*to the keen-faced gentleman*]. I say, Mr Denzil! who plays Gerald?

THE GENTLEMEN. Gerald?

THE LADY. The man I have my scene with in the third act—the hero——

THE GENTLEMAN. Oh, yes. Oh, a young gentleman from the country, I understand.

THE LADY. From the country!

THE GENTLEMAN. He is coming up by train this morning, Miss Parrott tells me; from Bath or somewhere——

THE LADY. Well, whoever he is, if he can't play that scene with me decently, my part's not worth rags.

TOM [*to* IMOGEN, *who is sitting at the prompt-table*]. Er—h'm—shall we begin, Miss Parrott?

IMOGEN. Certainly, Mr Wrench.

TOM. We'll begin, O'Dwyer.

[*The lady titters at some remark from the keen-faced gentleman.*

O'DWYER [*coming down the stage, violently*]. Clear the stage there! I'll not have it! Upon my honour, this is the noisiest theatre I've ever set foot in!

[*The wings are cleared, the characters disappearing into the green room.*

O'DWYER. I can't hear myself speak for all the riot and confusion!

TOM [*to* O'DWYER]. My dear O'Dwyer, there is *no* riot, there is *no* confusion——

IMOGEN [*to* O'DWYER]. Except the riot and confusion *you* are making.

TOM. You know, you're admirably earnest, O'Dwyer, but a little excitable.

O'DWYER [*calming himself*]. Oh, I beg your pardon, I'm sure. [*Emphatically*] My system is, begin as you mean to go on.

IMOGEN. But we *don't* mean to go on like that.

TOM. Of course not; of course not. Now, let me see—[*pointing to the right centre*] we shall want another chair here.

O'DWYER. Another chair?

TOM. A garden chair.

O'DWYER [*excitably*]. Another chair! Now, then, another chair! Properties! where are ye? do ye hear me callin'? must I raise my voice to ye——? [*He rushes away.*

IMOGEN [*to* TOM]. Phew! where did you get *him* from?

TOM [*wiping his brow*]. Known Michael for years—most capable, invaluable fellow——

IMOGEN [*simply*]. I wish he was dead.

TOM. So do I. [O'DWYER *returns, carrying a light chair.* Well, where's the property-man?

O'DWYER [*pleasantly*]. It's all right, now. He's gone to dinner.

TOM [*placing the chair in position*]. Ah, then he'll be back some time during the afternoon. [*Looking about him*] That will do. [*Taking up his manuscript*] Call—haven't you engaged a call-boy yet, O'Dwyer?

O'DWYER. I have, sir, and the best in London.

IMOGEN. Where is he?

O'DWYER. He has sint an apology for his non-attindance.

IMOGEN. Oh——!

O'DWYER. A sad case, ma'am; he's buryin' his wife.

TOM. Wife!

IMOGEN. The call-boy?

TOM. What's his age?

O'DWYER. Ye see, he happens to be an elder brother of my own——

IMOGEN *and* TOM. Oh, Lord!

TOM. Never mind! let's get on! Call Miss—— [*Looking toward the right*] Is that the Hall-keeper?

[*A man, suggesting by his appearance that he is the* HALL-KEEPER, *presents himself, with a card in his hand.*

O'DWYER [*furiously*]. Now, then! are we to be continually interrupted in this fashion? Have I, or have I not, given strict orders that nobody whatever——?

TOM. Hush, hush! see whose card it is; give me the card——

O'DWYER [*handing the card to* TOM]. Ah, I'll make rules here. In a week's time you'll not know this for the same theatre——

[TOM *has passed the card to* IMOGEN *without looking at it.*

IMOGEN [*staring at it blankly*]. Oh——!

TOM [*to her*]. Eh?

IMOGEN. Sir William!

TOM. Sir William!

IMOGEN. What can he want? what shall we do?

TOM [*after referring to his watch—to the* HALL-KEEPER]. Bring this gentleman on to the stage. [*The* HALL-KEEPER *withdraws. To* O'DWYER] Make yourself scarce for a few moments, O'Dwyer. Some private business——

O'DWYER. All right. I've plenty to occupy me. I'll begin to frame those rules—— [*He disappears.*

IMOGEN [*to* TOM]. Not here——

TOM [*to* IMOGEN]. The boy can't arrive for another twenty minutes. Besides, we must, sooner or later, accept responsibility for our act.

IMOGEN [*leaning upon his arm*]. Heavens! I foretold this!

TOM [*grimly*]. I know—"said so all along."

IMOGEN. If he should withdraw his capital!

TOM [*with clenched hands*]. At least, that would enable me to write a melodrama.

IMOGEN. Why?

TOM. I should then understand the motives and the springs of Crime!

[*The* HALL-KEEPER *reappears, showing the way to* SIR WILLIAM GOWER. SIR WILLIAM'S *hat is drawn down over his eyes, and the rest of his face is almost entirely concealed by his plaid. The* HALL-KEEPER *withdraws.*

TOM [*receiving* SIR WILLIAM]. How d'ye do, Sir William?

SIR WILLIAM [*giving him two fingers—with a grunt*]. Ugh!

TOM. These are odd surroundings for you to find yourself in. [IMOGEN *comes forward.*] Miss Parrott——

SIR WILLIAM [*advancing to her, giving her two fingers*]. Good morning, ma'am.

IMOGEN. This is perfectly delightful.

SIR WILLIAM. What is?

IMOGEN [*faintly*]. Your visit.

SIR WILLIAM. Ugh! [*Weakly*] Give me a cheer. [*Looking about him*] Have ye no cheers here?

TOM. Yes.

[TOM *places the throne-chair behind* SIR WILLIAM, *who sinks into it.*

SIR WILLIAM. Thank ye; much obleeged. [*To* IMOGEN] Sit. [IMOGEN *hurriedly fetches the stool and seats herself beside the throne-chair.* SIR WILLIAM *produces his snuff-box*]. You are astonished at seeing me here, I dare say?

TOM. Not at all.

SIR WILLIAM [*glancing at* TOM]. Addressing the lady. [*To* IMOGEN] You are surprised to see me?

IMOGEN. Very.

SIR WILLIAM [*to* TOM]. Ah! [TOM *retreats, getting behind* SIR WILLIAM'S *chair and looking down upon him.*] The truth is, I am beginning to regret my association with ye.

IMOGEN [*her hand to her heart*]. Oh—h—h—h!

TOM [*under his breath*]. Oh! [*Holding his fist over* SIR WILLIAM'S *head*] Oh—h—h—h!

IMOGEN [*piteously*]. You—you don't propose to withdraw your capital, Sir William?

SIR WILLIAM. That would be a breach of faith, ma'am——

IMOGEN. Ah!

TOM [*walking about, jauntily*]. Ha!

IMOGEN [*seizing* SIR WILLIAM'S *hand*]. Friend!

SIR WILLIAM [*withdrawing his hand sharply*]. I'll thank ye not to repeat that action, ma'am. But I—I have been slightly indisposed since I made your acqueentance in Clerkenwell; I find myself unable to sleep at night. [*To* TOM] That comedy of yours—it buzzes continually in my head, sir.

TOM. It was written with such an intention, Sir William—to buzz in people's heads.

SIR WILLIAM. Ah, I'll take care ye don't read me another, Mr Wicks; at any rate, another which contains a character resembling a member of my family—a *late* member of my family. I don't relish being reminded of late members of my family in this way, and being kept awake at night, thinking—turning over in my mind——

IMOGEN [*soothingly*]. Of course not.

SIR WILLIAM [*taking snuff*]. Pa—a—a—h! pi—i—i—sh! When I

saw Kean, as Richard, he reminded me of no member of my family. Shakespeare knew better than that, Mr Wicks. [*To* IMOGEN] And therefore, ma'am, upon receiving your letter last night, acqueenting me with your intention to commence rehearsing your comedy—[*glancing at* TOM] *his* comedy——

IMOGEN [*softly*]. *Our* comedy——

SIR WILLIAM. Ugh—to-day at noon, I determined to present myself here and request to be allowed to—to——

TOM. To watch the rehearsal?

SIR WILLIAM. The rehearsal of those episodes in your comedy which remind me of a member of my family—a *late* member.

IMOGEN [*constrainedly*]. Oh, certainly——

TOM [*firmly*]. By all means.

SIR WILLIAM [*rising, assisted by* TOM]. I don't wish to be steered at by any of your—what d'ye call 'em?—your gipsy crew——

TOM. Ladies and Gentlemen of the Company, we call 'em.

SIR WILLIAM [*tartly*]. I don't care what ye call 'em. [TOM *restores the throne-chair to its former position.*] Put me into a curtained box, where I can hear, and see, and not be seen; and when I have heard and seen enough, I'll return home—and—and—obtain a little sleep; and to-morrow I shall be well enough to sit in court again.

TOM [*calling*]. Mr O'Dwyer——

[O'DWYER *appears;* TOM *speaks a word or two to him, and hands him the manuscript of the play.*

IMOGEN [*to* SIR WILLIAM, *falteringly*]. And if you are pleased with what you see this morning, perhaps you will attend another——?

SIR WILLIAM [*angrily*]. Not I. After to-day I wash my hands of ye. What do plays and players do, coming into my head, disturbing my repose! [*More composedly, to* TOM, *who has returned to his side*] Your comedy has merit, sir. You call it *Life*. There is a character in it—a young man—not unlike life, not unlike a late member of my family. Obleege me with your arm. [*To* IMOGEN] Madam, I have arrived at the conclusion that Miss Trelawny belongs to a set of curious people who in other paths might have been useful members of society. But after to-day I've done with ye—done with ye—— [*To* TOM] My box, sir—my box—— [TOM *leads* SIR WILLIAM *up the stage.*

TOM [*to* O'DWYER]. Begin rehearsal. Begin rehearsal! Call Miss Trelawny! [TOM *and* SIR WILLIAM *disappear.*

O'DWYER. Miss Trelawny! Miss Trelawny! [*Rushing to the left*] Miss Trelawny! how long am I to stand here shoutin' myself hoarse——? [ROSE *appears.*

ROSE [*gently*]. Am I called?

O'DWYER [*instantly calm*]. You are, darlin'. [O'DWYER *takes his place at the prompt-table, book in hand.* IMOGEN *and* ROSE *stand together*

*in the centre. The other members of the company come from the green room and stand in the wings, watching the rehearsal.*] "At the opening of the play Peggy and Dora are discovered——" Who's Peggy? [*Excitedly*] Where's Peggy? Am I to——?

IMOGEN. Here I am! here I am! I am Peggy.

O'DWYER [*calm*]. Of course ye are, lovey—ma'am, I should say——

IMOGEN. Yes, you should.

O'DWYER. "Peggy is seated upon the Right, Dora on the Left——" [ROSE *and* IMOGEN *seat themselves accordingly. In a difficulty*] No—Peggy on the Left, Dora on the Right. [*Violently*] This is the worst written scrip I've ever held in my hand—— [ROSE *and* IMOGEN *change places.*] So horribly scrawled over, and interlined, and—no—I was quite correct. Peggy is on the Right, and Dora is on the Left. [IMOGEN *and* ROSE *again change seats.* O'DWYER *reads from the manuscript.*] "Peggy is engaged in—in——" I can't decipher it. A scrip like this is a disgrace to any well-conducted theatre. [*To* IMOGEN] I don't know what you're doin'. "Dora is—is——" [*To* ROSE] You are also doin' something or another. Now, then! When the curtain rises, you are discovered, both of ye, employed in the way described—— [TOM *returns.*] Ah, here ye are! [*Resigning the manuscript to* TOM, *and pointing out a passage*] I've got it smooth as far as there.

TOM. Thank you.

O'DWYER [*seating himself*]. You're welcome.

TOM [*to* ROSE *and* IMOGEN]. Ah, you're not in your right positions. Change places, please.

[IMOGEN *and* ROSE *change seats once more.* O'DWYER *rises and goes away.*

O'DWYER [*out of sight, violently*]. A scrip like that's a scandal! If there's a livin' soul that can read bad handwriting, I am that man! But of all the——!

TOM. Hush, hush! Mr O'Dwyer!

O'DWYER [*returning to his chair*]. Here.

TOM [*taking the book from the prompt-table and handing it to* IMOGEN]. You are reading.

O'DWYER [*sotto voce*]. I thought so.

TOM [*to* ROSE]. You are working.

O'DWYER. Working.

TOM [*pointing to the basket on the table*]. There are your needles and wool. [ROSE *takes the wool and the needles out of the basket.* TOM *takes the ball of wool from her and places it in the centre of the stage.*] You have allowed the ball of wool to roll from your lap on to the grass. You will see the reason for that presently.

ROSE. I remember it, Mr Wrench.

TOM. The curtain rises. [*To* IMOGEN] Miss Parrott——

IMOGEN [*referring to her part*]. What do I say?

TOM. Nothing—you yawn.

IMOGEN [*yawning, in a perfunctory way*]. Oh—h!

TOM. As if you meant it, of course.

IMOGEN. Well, of course.

TOM. Your yawn must tell the audience that you are a young lady who may be driven by boredom to almost any extreme.

O'DWYER [*jumping up*]. This sort of thing. [*Yawning extravagantly*] He—oh!

TOM [*irritably*]. Thank you, O'Dwyer; thank you.

O'DWYER [*sitting again*]. You're welcome.

TOM [*to* ROSE]. You speak.

ROSE [*reading from her part—retaining the needles and the end of the wool*]. "What are you reading, Miss Chaffinch?"

IMOGEN [*reading from her part*]. "A novel."

ROSE. "And what is the name of it?"

IMOGEN. "*The Seasons.*"

ROSE. "Why is it called that?"

IMOGEN. "Because all the people in it do seasonable things."

ROSE. "For instance——?"

IMOGEN. "In the Spring, fall in love."

ROSE. "In the Summer?"

IMOGEN. "Become engaged. Delightful!"

ROSE. "Autumn?"

IMOGEN. "Marry. Heavenly!"

ROSE. "Winter?"

IMOGEN. "Quarrel. Ha, ha, ha!"

TOM [*to* IMOGEN]. Close the book—with a bang——

O'DWYER [*bringing his hands together sharply by way of suggestion*]. Bang!

TOM [*irritably*]. Yes, yes, O'Dwyer. [*To* IMOGEN] Now rise——

O'DWYER. Up ye get!

TOM. And cross to Dora.

IMOGEN [*going to* ROSE]. "Miss Harrington, don't you wish occasionally that you were engaged to be married?"

ROSE. "No."

IMOGEN. "Not on wet afternoons?"

ROSE. "I am perfectly satisfied with this busy little life of mine, as your aunt's companion."

TOM [*to* IMOGEN]. Walk about, discontentedly.

IMOGEN [*walking about*]. "I've nothing to do; let's tell each other our ages."

ROSE. "I am nineteen."

TOM [*to* IMOGEN]. In a loud whisper——

IMOGEN. "I am twenty-two."

O'Dwyer [*rising and going to* Tom]. Now, hadn't ye better make that *six*-and-twenty?

Imogen [*joining them, with asperity*]. Why? why?

Tom. No, no, certainly not. Go on.

Imogen [*angrily*]. Not till Mr O'Dwyer retires into his corner.

Tom. O'Dwyer—— [O'Dwyer *takes his chair, and retires to the 'prompt-corner,' out of sight, with the air of martyrdom.* Tom *addresses* Rose.] You speak.

Rose. "I shall think, and feel, the same when I am twenty-two, I am sure. I shall never wish to marry."

Tom [*to* Imogen]. Sit on the stump of the tree.

Imogen. Where's that?

Tom [*pointing to the stool down the stage*]. Where that stool is.

Imogen [*sitting on the stool*]. "Miss Harrington, who is the Mr Gerald Leigh who is expected down to-day?"

Rose. "Lord Parracourt's secretary."

Imogen. "Old and poor!"

Rose. "Neither, I believe. He is the son of a college chum of Lord Parracourt's—so I heard his lordship tell Lady McArchie—and is destined for public life."

Imogen. "Then he's young!"

Rose. "Extremely, I understand."

Imogen [*jumping up, in obedience to a sign from* Tom]. "Oh, how can you be so spiteful!"

Rose. "I!"

Imogen. "You mean he's too young!"

Rose. "Too young for what?"

Imogen. "Too young for—oh, bother!"

Tom [*looking towards the keen-faced gentleman*]. Mr Denzil.

O'Dwyer [*putting his head round the corner*]. Mr Denzil!

[*The keen-faced gentleman comes forward, reading his part, and meets* Imogen.

The Gentleman [*speaking in the tones of an old man*]. "Ah, Miss Peggy!"

Tom [*to* Rose]. Rise, Miss Trelawny.

O'Dwyer [*his head again appearing*]. Rise, darlin'! [Rose *rises.*

The Gentleman [*to* Imogen]. "Your bravura has just arrived from London. Lady McArchie wishes you to try it over; and if I may add my entreaties——"

Imogen [*taking his arm*]. "Delighted, Lord Parracourt. [*To* Rose] Miss Harrington, bring your work indoors and hear me squall. [*To the* Gentleman] Why, you must have telegraphed to town!"

The Gentleman [*as they cross the stage*]. "Yes, but even telegraphy is too sluggish in executing your smallest command."

[IMOGEN *and the keen-faced gentleman go off on the left. He remains in the wings, she returns to the prompt-table.*

ROSE. "Why do Miss Chaffinch and her girl-friends talk of nothing, think of nothing apparently, but marriage? Ought a woman to make marriage the great object of life? can there be no other? I wonder——"

[*She goes off, the wool trailing after her, and disappears into the green room. The ball of wool remains in the centre of the stage.*

TOM [*reading from his manuscript*]. "The piano is heard; and Peggy's voice singing Gerald enters——"

IMOGEN [*clutching* TOM'S *arm*]. There——!

TOM. Ah, yes, here is Mr Gordon.

[ARTHUR *appears, in a travelling-coat.* TOM *and* IMOGEN *hasten to him and shake hands with him vigorously.*

TOM [*on* ARTHUR'S *right*]. How are you?

IMOGEN [*on his left, nervously*]. How are you?

ARTHUR [*breathlessly*]. Miss Parrott! Mr Wrench! forgive me if I am late; my cab-horse galloped from the station——

TOM. We have just reached your entrance. Have you read your part over?

ARTHUR. Read it! [*Taking it from his pocket*] I know every word of it! it has made my journey from Bristol like a flight through the air! Why, Mr Wrench [*turning over the leaves of his part*], some of this is almost *me*!

TOM *and* IMOGEN [*nervously*]. Ha, ha, ha!

TOM. Come! you enter! [*pointing to the right*] there! [*returning to the prompt-table with* IMOGEN] you stroll on, looking about you! Now, Mr Gordon!

ARTHUR [*advancing to the centre of the stage, occasionally glancing at his part*]. "A pretty place. I am glad I left the carriage at the lodge and walked through the grounds."

[*There is an exclamation, proceeding from the auditorium, and the sound of the overturning of a chair.*

IMOGEN. Oh!

O'DWYER [*appearing, looking into the auditorium*]. What's that? This is the noisiest theatre I've ever set foot in——!

TOM. Don't heed it! [*To* ARTHUR] Go on, Mr Gordon.

ARTHUR. "Somebody singing. A girl's voice. Lord Parracourt made no mention of anybody but his hostess—the dry, Scotch widow. [*Picking up the ball of wool*] This is Lady McArchie's, I'll be bound. The very colour suggests spectacles and iron-gray curls——"

TOM. Dora returns. [*Calling*] Dora!

O'DWYER. Dora! where are ye?

THE GENTLEMAN [*going to the green room door*]. Dora! Dora!
[ROSE *appears in the wings.*

ROSE [*to* TOM]. I'm sorry.

TOM. Go on, please!

[*There is another sound, nearer the stage, of the overturning of some object.*

O'DWYER. What——?

TOM. Don't heed it!

ROSE [*coming face to face with* ARTHUR]. Oh——!

ARTHUR. Rose!

TOM. Go on, Mr Gordon!

ARTHUR [*to* ROSE, *holding out the ball of wool*]. "I beg your pardon—are you looking for this?"

ROSE. "Yes, I—I—I——" Oh, Mr Gower, why are you here?

ARTHUR. Don't you know?

ROSE. No.

ARTHUR. Why, Miss Trelawny, I am trying to be what *you* are——

ROSE. What I am!

ARTHUR. Yes—a gipsy.

ROSE. A gipsy—a gip—— [*Dropping her head upon his breast*] Oh, Arthur! [SIR WILLIAM *enters, and comes forward on* ARTHUR'S *right.*

SIR WILLIAM. Arthur!

ARTHUR [*turning to him*]. Grandfather!

O'DWYER [*indignantly*]. Upon my soul——!

TOM. Leave the stage, O'Dwyer!

[O'DWYER *vanishes.* IMOGEN *goes to those who are in the wings and talks to them; gradually they withdraw into the green room.* ROSE *sinks on to the stool;* TOM *comes to her and stands beside her.*

SIR WILLIAM. What's this? what is it——?

ARTHUR [*bewildered*]. Sir, I—I—you—and—and Rose—are the last persons I expected to meet here——

SIR WILLIAM. Ah—h—h—h!

ARTHUR. Have you not learnt, sir, from Mr Wrench or Miss Parrott, that I have—become—an actor, sir?

SIR WILLIAM. Not *I*; [*pointing to* TOM *and* IMOGEN] these—these people have thought it decent to allow me to make the discovery for myself.

[*He sinks into the throne-chair.* TOM *goes to* SIR WILLIAM. ARTHUR *joins* IMOGEN; *they talk together rapidly and earnestly.*

TOM [*to* SIR WILLIAM]. Sir William, the secret of your grandson's choice of a profession——

SIR WILLIAM [*scornfully*]. Profession!

TOM. Was one that I was pledged to keep as long as it was possible to do so. And pray remember that your attendance here this morning is entirely your own act. It was our intention——

SIR WILLIAM [*struggling to his feet*]. Where is the door? the way to the door?

TOM. And let me beg you to understand this, Sir William—that Miss Trelawny was, till a moment ago, as ignorant as yourself of Mr Arthur Gower's doings, of his movements, of his whereabouts. She would never have thrown herself in his way, in this manner. Whatever conspiracy——

SIR WILLIAM. Conspiracy! the right word—conspiracy!

TOM. Whatever conspiracy there has been is my own—to bring these two young people together again, to make them happy.

[ROSE *holds out her hand to* TOM; *he takes it. They are joined by* IMOGEN.

SIR WILLIAM [*looking about him*]. The door! the door!

ARTHUR [*coming to* SIR WILLIAM]. Grandfather, may I, when rehearsal is over, venture to call in Cavendish Square——?

SIR WILLIAM. Call——!

ARTHUR. Just to see Aunt Trafalgar, sir? I hope Aunt Trafalgar is well, sir.

SIR WILLIAM [*with a slight change of tone*]. Your great-aunt Trafalgar? Ugh, yes, I suppose she will consent to see ye——

ARTHUR. Ah, sir——!

SIR WILLIAM. But *I* shall be out; *I* shall not be within doors.

ARTHUR. Then, if Aunt Trafalgar will receive me, sir, do you think I may be allowed to—to bring Miss Trelawny with me——?

SIR WILLIAM. What! ha, I perceive you have already acquired the impudence of your vagabond class, sir; the brazen effrontery of a set of——!

ROSE [*rising and facing him*]. Forgive him! forgive him! oh, Sir William, why may not Arthur become, some day, a *splendid* gipsy?

SIR WILLIAM. Eh?

ROSE. Like——

SIR WILLIAM [*peering into her face*]. Like——?

ROSE. Like——

TOM. Yes, sir, a gipsy, though of a different order from the old order which is departing—a gipsy of the new school!

SIR WILLIAM [*to* ROSE]. Well, Miss Gower is a weak, foolish lady; for aught I know she may allow this young man to—to—take ye——

IMOGEN. I would accompany Rose, of course, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM [*tartly*]. Thank ye, ma'am. [*Turning*] I'll go to my carriage.

ARTHUR. Sir, if you have the carriage here, and if you would have

the patience to sit out the rest of the rehearsal, we might return with you to Cavendish Square.

SIR WILLIAM [*choking*]. Oh—h—h—h!

ARTHUR. Grandfather, we are not rich people, and a cab to us——

SIR WILLIAM [*exhausted*]. Arthur——!

TOM. Sir William will return to his box! [*Going up the stage*] O'Dwyer!

SIR WILLIAM [*protesting weakly*]. No, sir! no! [O'DWYER *appears.*

TOM. Mr O'Dwyer, escort Sir William Gower to his box.

[ARTHUR *goes up the stage with* SIR WILLIAM, SIR WILLIAM *still uttering protests.* ROSE *and* IMOGEN *embrace.*

O'DWYER [*giving an arm to* SIR WILLIAM]. Lean on me, sir! heavily, sir——!

TOM. Shall we proceed with the rehearsal, Sir William, or wait till you are seated?

SIR WILLIAM [*violently*]. Wait! Confound ye, d'ye think I want to remain here all day! [SIR WILLIAM *and* O'DWYER *disappear.*

TOM [*coming forward, with* ARTHUR *on his right—wildly*]. Go on with the rehearsal! Mr Gordon and Miss Rose Trelawny! Miss Trelawny! [ROSE *goes to him.*] Trelawny—late of the 'Wells'! Let us—let—— [*Gripping* ARTHUR'S *hand tightly, he bows his head upon* ROSE'S *shoulder.*] Oh, my dears——! let us—get on with the rehearsal——!

# THE LIARS

## By HENRY ARTHUR JONES

"Above all things, tell no untruth; no, not in trifles; the custom of it is naughty."—*Sir Henry Sidney's letter to his son Philip Sidney.*

*First produced at the Criterion Theatre, London, October* 6, 1897

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Colonel Sir Christopher Deering
Edward Falkner
Gilbert Nepean, *Lady Jessica's husband*
George Nepean, *Gilbert's brother*
Freddie Tatton, *Lady Rosamund's husband*
Archibald Coke, *Dolly's husband*
Waiter at the Star and Garter
Gadsby, *footman at Freddie Tatton's*
Taplin, *Sir Christopher's servant*
Footman at Cadogan Gardens
Lady Jessica Nepean, Lady Rosamund Tatton } *sisters*
Dolly Coke, *their cousin*
Beatrice Ebernoe
Mrs Crespin
Ferris, *Lady Jessica's maid*

Time: *The present.*

IN melodrama "black is black and white is white, and to evolve three or four hours' traffic of the stage out of these unvarying constants calls for a high degree of dramatic inventiveness, especially when the artistic simplicity of good melodrama is preserved. That is why melodrama is, of all dramatic forms, the most sincere, the most honest of purpose. It is as true to the eternal verities as the pulpit, and has to be, for though its great unselected audience may be uncritical artistically, it is ethically the most severe of critics. To write melodrama with the tongue in the cheek is to woo disaster."

It is pertinent in writing of the late Henry Arthur Jones to recall Mr Frank Vernon's defence of melodrama. Mr Jones wrote *The Middleman*

and was part-author of *The Silver King*, classical examples of the best kind of melodrama, which depends not upon sensational stage-carpentry, but upon simple, direct emotion.

In most of Mr Jones's plays a whole-souled hatred of hypocrisy is to be discerned as the leading motive. He called one play, simply, *The Hypocrites*. He had a period, the period of *Saints and Sinners*, *Judah*, and *The Crusaders*, culminating in *Michael and his Lost Angel*, of which the late Joseph Knight wrote: "The bent of Mr Jones's mind, or the effect of his early environment, seems to force him into showing the struggle between religious or priestly training and high, sincere aspiration on the one hand, and on the other those influences, half earthly, half divine, of our physical nature which sap where they cannot escalade, and in the highest natures end always in victory."

To this a comedy period succeeded, and among many plays *The Liars*, *The Manœuvres of Jane*, and *Mrs Dane's Defence* seem to stand out. The big scene in *Mrs Dane's Defence*, of a ruthless cross-examination by a man of a woman who has something to conceal, is exemplary in its simplicity, and in being contrived without the cumbersome surrounding circumstance of a court of law. But of all the comedies it is probably *The Liars* which is, justly, the most famous.

# ACT I

SCENE: *Interior of a large tent on the lawn of* FREDDIE TATTON'S *house in the Thames valley. The roof of the tent slopes up from the back of the stage. An opening at back discovers the lawn, a night scene of a secluded part of the Thames, and the opposite bank beyond. Small opening to the left. The tent is of Eastern material, splendidly embroidered in rich Eastern colours. The floor is planked and some rugs are laid down. The place is comfortably furnished for summer tea- and smoking-room. Several little tables, chairs, and lounges, most of them of basket-work. On the table spirit-decanters, soda-water bottles, cigars, cigarettes, empty coffee-cups, matchbox, etc. Some plants in the corners. Lamps and candles lighted.*

TIME: *After dinner on a summer evening.*

*Discover* ARCHIBALD COKE *and* FREDDIE TATTON. COKE, *a tall, pompous, precise man, about fifty, is seated at side-table smoking.* FREDDIE, *a nervous, weedy little creature about thirty, with no whiskers, and nearly bald, with a very squeaky voice, is walking about.*

FREDDIE [*very excited, very voluble, very squeaky*]. It's all very well for folks to say, "Give a woman her head; don't ride her on the curb." But I tell you this, Coke, when a fellow has got a wife like mine, or Jess, it's confoundedly difficult to get her to go at all without a spill, eh?

COKE. It is perplexing to know precisely how to handle a wife [*drinks, sighs*]—very perplexing!

FREDDIE. Perplexing? It's a d—ee—d silly riddle without any answer! You know I didn't want to have this house-party for the Regatta—[COKE *looks at him*]—I beg your pardon. Of course I wanted to have you and Dolly, and I didn't mind Gilbert and Jess. But I didn't want to have Falkner here. He's paying a great deal too much attention to Jess, and Jess doesn't choke him off as she should. Well, I thoroughly made up my mind if Jess came, Falkner shouldn't.

COKE. Yes?

FREDDIE. Well, Rosamund said he should. So I stuck out, and she stuck out, in fact we both stuck out for a week. I was determined he shouldn't come.

COKE. Then why did you give in?

FREDDIE. I didn't.

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COKE. But he's here!

FREDDIE. Yes; but only for a few days. Rosamund invited him, unknown to me, and then—well—you see, I was obliged to be civil to the fellow. [*Very confidential*] I say, Coke—we're tiled in, aren't we? Candidly, what would you do if you had a wife like Rosamund?

COKE [*sententiously*]. Ah! Just so! [*Drinks.*

FREDDIE. You're the lucky man of us three, Coke.

COKE. I must own my wife has some good points——

FREDDIE. Dolly got good points! I should think she has!

COKE. But she's terribly thoughtless and frivolous.

FREDDIE. So much the better. Give me a woman that lets a man call his soul his own. That's all I want, Coke, to call my soul my own. And—[*resolutely*] some of these days—[*very resolutely*] I will, that's all!

[*Enter* MRS CRESPIN, *a sharp, good-looking woman between thirty and thirty-five.*

MRS CRESPIN. Is Mr Gilbert Nepean leaving for Devonshire to-night?

FREDDIE. Yes. He takes the eleven thirty-four slow and waits for the down fast at Reading.

MRS CRESPIN. To-night?

FREDDIE. Yes. His steward, Crampton, has been robbing him for years, and now the fellow has bolted with a heap of money and a farmer's wife.

MRS CRESPIN. Mr Nepean must go to-night?

FREDDIE. Yes. Why?

MRS CRESPIN. Lady Jessica and Mr Falkner have gone for a little moonlight row. I thought Mr Nepean might like to stay and steer.

FREDDIE. Oh, Lady Jessica knows the river well.

MRS CRESPIN. Ah, then Mr Nepean can look after the steward. After all, no husband need emphasize the natural absurdity of his position by playing cox to another man's stroke, need he?

[*Enter* COLONEL SIR CHRISTOPHER DEERING, *a genial, handsome Englishman about thirty-eight, and* GEORGE NEPEAN, *a dark, rather heavy-looking man about the same age.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, nonsense, Nepean; you're mistaken!

GEORGE. You'd better say a word to Falkner——

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*with a warning look*]. Shush!

GEORGE. If you don't, I shall drop a very strong hint to my brother.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*more peremptorily*]. Shush, shush!

FREDDIE. What's the matter?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Nothing, Freddie, nothing! Our friend here [*trying to link his arm in* GEORGE'S—GEORGE *stands off*] is a little old-fashioned. He doesn't understand that in all really innocent flirtations ladies allow themselves a very large latitude indeed. In fact, from my

very modest experience with the sex—take it for what it's worth—I should say the more innocent the flirtation, the larger the latitude the lady allows herself, eh, Mrs Crespin?

MRS CRESPIN. Oh, we are all latitudinarians at heart.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Yes; but a lady who practises extensively as a latitudinarian rarely becomes a—a—a longitudinarian, eh?

MRS CRESPIN. Oh, I wouldn't answer for her! It's a horrid, wicked world; and if once a woman allows one of you wretches to teach her the moral geography of it, it's ten to one she gets her latitude and longitude mixed before she has had time to look at the map.

FREDDIE [*to* SIR CHRISTOPHER]. I say, I'm awfully sorry about this. You know I told Rosamund how it would be if we had Falkner here——

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*draws* FREDDIE *aside*]. Shush! Tell Lady Rosamund to caution Lady Jessica——

FREDDIE. I will. But Rosamund generally does just the opposite of what I tell her. Don't be surprised, old fellow, if you hear some of these days that I've—well, don't be surprised.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. At what?

FREDDIE. Well, I shall—now, candidly, old fellow—we're tiled in, quite between ourselves—if you found yourself landed as I am, what would you do?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You mean if I found myself married?

FREDDIE. Yes.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I should make the best of it.

GEORGE [*to* SIR CHRISTOPHER]. Then it's understood that you'll give Falkner a hint?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. My dear fellow, surely your brother is the best judge——

GEORGE. Of what he doesn't see?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. He's here.

GEORGE. He's leaving for Devonshire to-night—unless I stop him. Will that be necessary?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. No. Falkner is my friend. I introduced him to Lady Jessica. If you insist, I'll speak to him. But I'm sure you're wrong. He's the very soul of honour. I didn't live with him out there those three awful years without knowing him.

GEORGE. I don't see what your living three years in Africa with him has got to do with it, eh, Mrs Crespin?

MRS CRESPIN. Let's see how it works out. Falkner behaves most gallantly in Africa. Falkner rescues Mrs Ebernoe. Falkner splendidly avenges Colonel Ebernoe's death, and strikes terror into every slave-dealer's heart. Falkner returns to England covered with glory. A grateful nation goes into a panic of admiration, and makes itself slightly ridiculous over Falkner. Falkner is the lion of the season. Therefore

we may be quite sure that Falkner won't make love to any pretty woman who comes in his way. It doesn't seem to work out right.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. But Falkner is not an ordinary man, not even an ordinary hero.

MRS CRESPIN. My dear Sir Christopher, the one cruel fact about heroes is that they are made of flesh and blood! Oh, if only they were made of waxwork, of Crown Derby ware, or Britannia metal; but, alas and alas! they're always made of flesh and blood.

COKE. Where did Falkner come from? What were his people?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. His grandfather was what Nonconformists call an eminent divine, his father was a rich City merchant; his mother was a farmer's daughter. Falkner himself is a—well, he's a Puritan Don Quixote, mounted on Pegasus.

MRS CRESPIN. Put a Puritan Don Quixote on horseback, and he'll ride to the—Lady Jessica, eh?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Hush! He'll love and he'll ride away.

MRS CRESPIN [*significantly*]. I sincerely hope so.

COKE. I must say that Falkner is less objectionable than Dissenters generally are. I have an unconquerable aversion to Dissenters.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, I hate 'em. But they saved England, hang 'em! And I'm not sure whether they're not the soundest part of the nation to-day.

MRS CRESPIN. Oh, pray don't tell them so, just as they're getting harmless and sensible—and a little artistic.

[*A piano is played very softly and beautifully at a distance of some twenty yards. They all listen.*

MRS CRESPIN. Is that Mrs Ebernoe?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

MRS CRESPIN. What a beautiful touch she has!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. She has a beautiful nature.

MRS CRESPIN. Indeed! I thought she was a little stiff and unsociable. But perhaps we are too frivolous.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Perhaps. And she hasn't quite recovered from poor Ebernoe's death.

[*Enter* LADY ROSAMUND *and* DOLLY COKE *in evening dress.* DOLLY *is without any wrap on her shoulders.*

MRS CRESPIN. But that's nearly two years ago. Is it possible we still have women amongst us who can mourn two years for a man? It gives me hopes again for my sex.

FREDDIE [*his back to* LADY ROSAMUND]. I know jolly well Rosamund won't mourn two years for me.

LADY ROSAMUND [*a clear-cut, bright, pretty woman*]. You're quite right, Freddie, I shan't. But if you behave very prettily meantime, I promise you a decent six weeks. So be satisfied, and don't make a

disturbance down there [*with a little gesture pointing down*] and create the impression that I wasn't a model wife.

Coke [*in a very querulous, pedantic tone to* Dolly]. No wrap again! Really, my dear, I do wish you would take more precautions against the night air. If you should take influenza again——

Dolly [*pretty, empty-headed little woman*]. Oh, my dear Archie, if I do, it is I who will have to cough and sneeze!

Coke. Yes; but it is I who will be compelled to listen to you. I do wish you would remember how very inconvenient it is for me when you have influenza.

Dolly. Oh, my dear, you don't expect me to remember *all* the things that are inconvenient to you. Besides other people don't wrap up. Jessica is out on the river with absolutely nothing on her shoulders.

Mrs Crespin. Is it not a physiological fact that when our hearts reach a certain temperature our shoulders may be, and often are, safely left bare?

[George Nepean *has been listening. He comes some steps towards them as if about to speak, stops, then turns, and exit with great determination.*

Sir Christopher. Mrs Crespin, you saw that?

Mrs Crespin. Yes. Where has he gone?

Sir Christopher. I suppose to tell his brother his suspicions. I'm sure you meant nothing just now, but—[*glancing round*]—we are all friends of Lady Jessica's, aren't we?

Mrs Crespin. Oh, certainly. But don't you think you ought to get Mr Falkner away?

Sir Christopher. He'll be leaving England soon. These fresh outbreaks amongst the slave-traders will give us no end of trouble, and the Government will have to send Falkner out. Meantime——

Mrs Crespin. Meantime, doesn't Mrs Ebernoe play divinely?

Sir Christopher [*politely intercepting her*]. Meantime it's understood that nothing more is to be said of this?

Mrs Crespin. Oh, my dear Sir Christopher, what more can be said?

[*Exit.*

Sir Christopher [*holds the tent curtains aside for her to pass out; looks after her, shakes his head, perplexed, then turns to* Coke]. Coke, what do you say, a hundred up?

Coke. I'm agreeable! Dolly! Dolly!

[Lady Rosamund, Dolly, *and* Freddie *are chattering very vigorously together.*

Dolly [*doesn't turn round to him*]. Well?

[*Goes on chattering to* Lady Rosamund *and* Freddie.

Coke. You had a tiresome hacking cough, dear, during the greater portion of last night.

DOLLY. Did I? [*Continues chattering.*

COKE. It would be wise to keep away from the river.

DOLLY. Oh, very well, dear. I'll try and remember. [*Goes on chattering.*

COKE [*turns, annoyed, to* SIR CHRISTOPHER]. I'm a painfully light sleeper. The least thing disturbs me, and—— [*Looks anxiously at* DOLLY, *who is still chattering, then turns to* SIR CHRISTOPHER.] Do you sleep well?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*links his arm in* COKE'S]. Like a top. Never missed a night's rest in my life. [*Takes* COKE *off.*

FREDDIE [*has been talking angrily to* LADY ROSAMUND]. Very well, then, what am I to do?

DOLLY. Oh, do go and get a whisky-and-soda, there's a dear Freddie!

FREDDIE. That's all very well, but if Jessica goes and makes a fool of herself in my house, people will say it was my fault.

LADY ROSAMUND. What—example, or influence, or sheer desperate imitation?

FREDDIE [*pulls himself up, looks very satirical, evidently tries to think of some crushing reply without success*]. I must say, Rosamund, that your continued chaff of me and everything that I do is in execrable taste. For a woman to chaff her husband on all occasions is—well, it's in very bad taste, that's all I can say about it! [*Exit.*

DOLLY. Freddie's getting a dreadful fidget. He's nearly as bad as Archie.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, my dear, he's ten times worse. One can't help feeling some small respect for Archie.

DOLLY. Oh, do you think so? Well, yes, I suppose Archie is honourable and all that.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, all men are honourable. They get kicked out if they aren't. My Freddie's honourable in his poor little way.

DOLLY. Oh, don't run Freddie down. I rather like Freddie.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, if you had to live with him——

DOLLY. Well, he always lets you have your own way.

LADY ROSAMUND. I wish he wouldn't. I really believe I should love and respect him a little more if he were to take me and give me a good shaking, or do something to make me feel that he's my master. But [*sighs*] he never will! He'll only go on asking everybody's advice how to manage me—and never find out. As if it weren't the easiest thing in the world to manage a woman—if men only knew.

DOLLY. Oh, do you think so? I wonder if poor old Archie knows how to manage me!

LADY ROSAMUND. Archie's rather trying at times.

DOLLY. Oh, he is! He's so frumpish and particular, and he's getting worse.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, my dear, they do as they grow older.

DOLLY. Still, after all, Freddie and Archie aren't quite so awful as Gilbert.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, Gilbert's a terror. I hope Jessica won't do anything foolish——

[*A very merry peal of laughter heard off, followed by* LADY JESSICA'S *voice.*

LADY JESSICA [*heard off*]. Oh, no, no, no, no, no! Please keep away from my dress! Oh, I'm so sorry! [*Laughing a little*] But you are—so—so—— [*Another peal of laughter.*

FALKNER [*heard off, a deep, rich, sincere, manly tone*]. So ridiculous? I don't mind that!

LADY JESSICA [*heard off*]. But you'll take cold. Do go and change!

FALKNER [*heard off*]. Change? That's not possible!

[LADY JESSICA *appears at opening at back, looking off, smothering her laughter. She is a very bright, pretty woman about twenty-seven, very dainty and charming. Piano ceases.*

LADY JESSICA. Oh, the poor, dear, foolish fellow! Look!

LADY ROSAMUND. What is it?

LADY JESSICA. My ten-and-sixpenny brooch! He kept on begging for some little souvenir, so I took this off. That quite unhinged him. I saw he was going to be demonstrative, so I dropped the brooch in the river and made a terrible fuss. He jumped in, poor dear, and fished it up. It was so muddy at the bottom! He came up looking like a *fin-de-siècle* Neptune—or a forsaken merman—or the draggled figure-head of a penny Thames steamboat.

LADY ROSAMUND [*very seriously*]. Jess, the men are talking about you.

LADY JESSICA [*very carelessly*]. Ah, are they? Who is?

LADY ROSAMUND. My Freddie says that you——

LADY JESSICA [*interrupting on "says"*]. My dear Rosy, I don't mind what your Freddie says any more than you do.

LADY ROSAMUND. But George has been fizzing up all the evening.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, let him fizz down again.

LADY ROSAMUND. But I believe he has gone to give Gilbert a hint——

LADY JESSICA [*showing annoyance*]. Ah, that's mean of George! How vexing! Perhaps Gilbert will stay now.

LADY ROSAMUND. Perhaps it's as well that Gilbert should stay.

LADY JESSICA. What? My dear Rosy, you know I'm the very best of wives, but it does get a little monotonous to spend all one's time in the company of a man who doesn't understand a joke—not even when it's explained to him!

LADY ROSAMUND. Jess, you really must pull up.

DOLLY. Yes, Jess. Mrs Crespin was making some very cattish remarks about you and Mr Falkner.

LADY JESSICA. Was she? Rosy, why do you have that woman here?

LADY ROSAMUND. I don't know. One must have somebody. I thought you and she were very good friends.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, we're the best of friends, only we hate each other like poison.

LADY ROSAMUND. I don't like her. But she says such stinging things about my Freddie, and makes him so wild.

LADY JESSICA. Does she? I'll ask her down for the shooting. Oh! I've got a splendid idea!

LADY ROSAMUND. What is it?

LADY JESSICA. A new career for poor gentlewomen. You found a school and carefully train them in all the best traditions of the gentle art of husband-baiting. Then you invite one of them to your house, pay her, of course, a handsome salary, and she assists you in "the daily round, the common task" of making your husband's life a perfect misery to him. After a month or so she is played out and retires to another sphere, and you call in a new—lady-help!

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, I don't think I should care to have my Freddie systematically henpecked by another woman.

LADY JESSICA. No; especially as you do it so well yourself. Besides, your Freddie is such a poor little pocket-edition of a man—I hope you don't mind my saying so——

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, not at all. He's your own brother-in-law.

LADY JESSICA. Yes; and you may say what you like about Gilbert.

DOLLY. Oh, we do, don't we, Rosy?

LADY JESSICA. Do you? Well, what do you say?

DOLLY. Oh, it wouldn't be fair to tell, would it, Rosy? But Mrs Crespin said yesterday——

[LADY ROSAMUND *glances at* DOLLY *and stops her.*

LADY JESSICA. About Gilbert?

DOLLY. Yes.

LADY JESSICA. Well, what did she say?

[DOLLY *glances at* LADY ROSAMUND *inquiringly.*

LADY ROSAMUND. No, Dolly, no!

LADY JESSICA. Yes, Dolly! Do tell me.

LADY ROSAMUND. No, no!

LADY JESSICA. I don't care what she said, so long as she didn't say he could understand a joke. That would be shamefully untrue. I've lived with him for five years, and I'm sure he can't. But what did Mrs Crespin say, Rosy?

LADY ROSAMUND. No, it really was a little too bad.

DOLLY. Yes. I don't much mind what anybody says about Archie, but if Mrs Crespin had said about him what she said about Gilbert——

LADY JESSICA. But what did she say? Rosy, if you don't tell me, I

won't tell you all the dreadful things I hear about your Freddie. Oh, do tell me! There's a dear!

LADY ROSAMUND. Well, she said—— [*Begins laughing.*

[DOLLY *begins laughing.*

LADY JESSICA. Oh, go on! go on! go on!

LADY ROSAMUND. She said—no, I'll whisper!

[LADY JESSICA *inclines her ear,* LADY ROSAMUND *whispers;* DOLLY *laughs.*

LADY JESSICA. About Gilbert? [*Beginning to laugh.*

LADY ROSAMUND. Yes. [*Laughing.*

[*They all join in a burst of laughter which grows louder and louder. At its height enter* GILBERT NEPEAN. *He is a man rather over forty, much the same build as his brother* GEORGE; *rather stout, heavy figure, dark complexion; strong, immobile, uninteresting features; large, coarse hands; a habit of biting his nails. He is dressed in tweeds, long light ulster and travelling-cap, which he does not remove. As he enters the laughter, which has been very boisterous, suddenly ceases. He goes up to table without taking any notice of the ladies; very deliberately takes out cigar from case, strikes a match which does not ignite, throws it down with an angry gesture and exclamation; strikes another which also does not ignite; throws it down with a still angrier gesture and exclamation. The third match ignites, and he deliberately lights his cigar. Meantime, as soon as he has reached table,* LADY JESSICA, *who stands behind him, exchanges glances with* DOLLY *and* LADY ROSAMUND, *and makes a little face behind his back.* LADY ROSAMUND *winks at* LADY JESSICA, *who responds by pulling a mock long face.* LADY ROSAMUND *steals off.* DOLLY *shrugs her shoulders at* LADY JESSICA, *who pulls her face still longer.* DOLLY *steals quietly off after* LADY ROSAMUND. GILBERT *is still busy with his cigar.* LADY JESSICA *does a little expressive pantomime behind his back.*

GILBERT. What's all this tomfoolery with Falkner?

LADY JESSICA. Tomfoolery?

GILBERT. George says you are carrying on some tomfoolery with Falkner.

LADY JESSICA. Ah! that's very sweet and elegant of George. But I never carry on any tomfoolery with anyone—because I'm not a tomfool, therefore I can't.

GILBERT. I wish for once in your life you'd give me a plain answer to a plain question.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, I did once. You shouldn't remind me of that.

But I never bear malice. Ask me another, such as—if a herring and a half cost three ha'pence, how long will it take one's husband to learn politeness enough to remove his cap in his wife's presence?

GILBERT [*instinctively takes off his cap, then glancing at her attitude, which is one of amused defiance, he puts the cap on again*]. There's a draught here.

LADY JESSICA. The lamp doesn't show it. But perhaps you are right to guard a sensitive spot.

GILBERT. I say there's a confounded draught.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, don't tell fibs, dear. Because if you do, you'll go —where you *may* meet me; and then we should have to spend such a very long time together.

GILBERT [*nonplussed, a moment or two; takes out his watch*]. I've no time to waste. I must be down in Devonshire to-morrow to go into this business of Crampton's. But before I go, I mean to know the truth of this nonsense between you and Falkner.

LADY JESSICA. Ah!

GILBERT. Shall I get it from you—or from him?

LADY JESSICA. Wouldn't it be better to get it from me? Because he mightn't tell you *all*?

GILBERT. *All?* Then there is something to know?

LADY JESSICA. Heaps. And if you'll have the ordinary politeness to take off that very ugly cap I'll be very sweet and obedient and tell you *all*.

GILBERT. Go on!

LADY JESSICA. Not while the cap sits there!

GILBERT. I tell you I feel the draught.

[LADY JESSICA *rises, goes to the tent-openings, carefully draws the curtains. He watches her sulkily.*

LADY JESSICA. There! now you may safely venture to uncover the sensitive spot.

GILBERT [*firmly*]. No.

LADY JESSICA [*serenely, seated*]. Very well, my dear. Then I shan't open my lips.

GILBERT. You won't?

LADY JESSICA No; and I'm sure it's far more important for you to know what is going on between Mr Falkner and me than to have that horrid thing sticking on your head.

GILBERT [*takes a turn or two, bites his nails, at length sulkily flings the cap on the chair*]. Now!

LADY JESSICA. Mr Falkner is very deeply attached to me, I believe.

GILBERT. He has told you so?

LADY JESSICA. No.

GILBERT. No?

LADY JESSICA. No; but that's only because I keep on stopping him.

GILBERT. You keep on stopping him?

LADY JESSICA. Yes; it's so much pleasanter to have him dangling for a little while, and *then*——

GILBERT. Then what?

LADY JESSICA. Well, it is pleasant to be admired.

GILBERT. And you accept his admiration?

LADY JESSICA. Of course I do. Why shouldn't I? If Mr Falkner admires me, isn't that the greatest compliment he can pay to your taste? And if he spares you the drudgery of being polite to me, flattering me, complimenting me, and paying me the hundred delicate little attentions that win a woman's heart, I'm sure you ought to be very much obliged to him for taking all that trouble off your hands.

GILBERT [*looks furious*]. Now understand me. This nonsense has gone far enough. I forbid you to have anything further to say to the man.

LADY JESSICA. Ah, you forbid me!

GILBERT. I forbid you. And, understand, if you do——

LADY JESSICA. Ah, take care! Don't threaten me!

GILBERT. Do you mean to respect my wishes?

LADY JESSICA. Of course I shall respect your wishes. I may not obey them, but I will respect them.

GILBERT [*enraged, comes up to her very angrily*]. Now, Jessica, once for all—— [*Enter* GEORGE. GILBERT *stops suddenly.*

GEORGE. The dog-cart's ready, Gilbert. What's the matter?

GILBERT. Nothing. [*To* LADY JESSICA] You'll please to come on to me at Teignwick to-morrow.

LADY JESSICA. Can't. I've promised to go to Barbara, and I must keep my promise, even though it parts me from you. [*Enter* SERVANT.

SERVANT. You've only just time to catch the train, sir.

GILBERT. I'm not going.

SERVANT. Not going, sir?

GILBERT. No. [*Exit* SERVANT.

LADY JESSICA [*appeals to* GEORGE]. Isn't it dear of him to stay here on my account when he knows he ought to be in Devon? Isn't it sweet to think that after five long years one has still that magnetic attraction for one's husband?

GILBERT. No. I'm hanged if I stay on your account. [*Goes up to opening, calls out*] Hi! Gadsby! I'm coming! Understand, I expect you at Teignwick to-morrow.

LADY JESSICA. Dearest, I shan't come.

GILBERT. I say you shall!

LADY JESSICA. 'Shall' is not a pretty word for a husband to use.

[*Takes up the cap he has thrown down and stands twiddling the tassel.*

GILBERT [*after a furious dig at his nails*]. George, I expect this business of Crampton's will keep me for a week, but I can't tell. Look after everything while I'm away. [*To* LADY JESSICA] You won't come to Teignwick?

LADY JESSICA. I've promised Barbara. Here's your cap.

GILBERT. Good-bye, George!

[*Looks at* LADY JESSICA, *and is then going off at back.*

LADY JESSICA. Ta, ta, dearest!

GILBERT [*turns, comes a step or two to* LADY JESSICA, *livid with anger; speaks in her ear*]. You'll go just one step too far some day, madam, and if you do, look out for yourself, for, by God! I won't spare you!

[*Exit.* LADY JESSICA *stands a little frightened, goes up to opening at back, as if to call him back, comes down.* GEORGE *stands watching her, smoking.*

LADY JESSICA [*after a little pause*]. George, that was very silly of you to tell Gilbert about Mr Falkner and me.

GEORGE. I thought you had gone far enough.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, no, my dear friend. You must allow me to be the best judge of how far——

GEORGE. How far you can skate over thin ice?

LADY JESSICA. The thinner the ice the more delicious the fun, don't you think? Ah, you're like Gilbert. You don't skate—or joke.

GEORGE. You heard what Gilbert said?

LADY JESSICA. Yes; that was a hint to you. Won't it be rather a tiresome task for you?

GEORGE. What?

LADY JESSICA. To keep an eye on me, watch that I don't go that one step too far. And not quite a nice thing to do, eh?

GEORGE. Oh, I've no intention of watching you——

[*Enter* FALKNER.

[*Looking at the two*] Not the least intention, I assure you. [*Exit.*

LADY JESSICA. So to-morrow will break up our pleasant party.

FALKNER [*about forty, strong, fine, clearly cut features, earnest expression, hair turning gray, complexion pale and almost gray with continued work, anxiety, and abstinence*]. And after to-morrow?

LADY JESSICA. Ah, after to-morrow!

FALKNER. When shall we meet again?

LADY JESSICA. Shall we meet again? Yes, I suppose. Extremes do meet, don't they?

FALKNER. Are we extremes?

LADY JESSICA. Aren't we? I suppose I'm the vainest, emptiest, most irresponsible creature in the world——

FALKNER. You're not! you're not! You slander yourself! You can be sincere, you can be earnest, you can be serious——

LADY JESSICA. Can I? Oh, do tell me what fun there is in being serious! I can't see the use of it. There you are, for instance, mounted on that high horse of seriousness, spending the best years of your life in fighting African slave-traders and other windmills of that sort. Oh, do leave the windmills alone! They'll all tumble by themselves by and by.

FALKNER. I'm not going to spend the best years of my life in fighting slave-traders. I'm going to spend them—in loving you.

[*Approaching her very closely.*

LADY JESSICA. Oh, that will be worse than the windmills—and quite as useless. [*He is very near to her.*] If you please—you remember we promised to discuss all love matters at a distance of three feet, so as to allow for the personal equation. Your three feet, please.

FALKNER. When shall we meet again?

LADY JESSICA. Ah, when? Where do you go to-morrow night, when you leave here?

FALKNER. I don't know. Where do you?

LADY JESSICA. To my cousin Barbara's.

FALKNER. Where is that?

LADY JESSICA. Oh, a little way along the river, towards town; not far from Staines.

FALKNER. In what direction?

LADY JESSICA. About two miles to the nor'-nor'-sou'-west. I never was good at geography.

FALKNER. Is there a good inn near?

LADY JESSICA. There's a delightful little riverside hotel, the Star and Garter, at Shepperford. They make a speciality of French cooking.

FALKNER. I shall go there when I leave here to-morrow. May I call at your cousin's?

LADY JESSICA. It wouldn't be wise. And I'm only staying till Monday.

FALKNER. And then?

LADY JESSICA. On Monday evening I go back to town.

FALKNER. Alone?

LADY JESSICA. No; with Ferris, my maid. Unless I send her on first.

FALKNER. And you will?

LADY JESSICA. No; I don't think so. But a curious thing happened to me the last time I stayed at Barbara's. I sent Ferris on with the luggage in the early afternoon, and I walked to the station for the sake of the walk. Well, there are two turnings, and I must have taken the wrong one.

FALKNER. What happened?

LADY JESSICA. I wandered about for miles, and at half-past seven I found myself, very hot, very tired, very hungry, and in a very bad temper, at the Star and Garter at Shepperford. That was on a Monday too.

FALKNER. That was on a Monday?

LADY JESSICA. Yes—hark! [*Goes suddenly to back, looks off.*] Oh, it's you, Ferris! What are you doing there?

[FERRIS, *a perfectly trained lady's maid, about thirty, dark, quiet, reserved, a little sinister-looking, appears at opening at back with wrap in hand.*

FERRIS. I beg pardon, my lady. But I thought you might be getting chilly, so I've brought you this.

LADY JESSICA. Put it on the chair.

FERRIS. Yes, my lady. [*Exit.*

LADY JESSICA [*yawns*]. Heigho! Shall we go into the billiard-room? [*Going.*

FALKNER. No. How long do you mean to play with me?

LADY JESSICA. Am I playing with you?

FALKNER. What else have you done the last three months? My heart is yours to its last beat. My life is yours to its last moment. What are you going to do with me?

LADY JESSICA. Ah, that's it! I'm sure I don't know. [*Smiling at him*] What shall I do with you?

FALKNER. Love me! love me! love me!

LADY JESSICA. You are very foolish!

FALKNER. Foolish to love you?

LADY JESSICA. No; not foolish to love me. I like you for that. But foolish to love me so foolishly. Foolish to be always wanting to play Romeo, when I only want to play Juliet sometimes.

FALKNER. Sometimes? When?

LADY JESSICA. When I am foolish too—on a Monday evening.

FALKNER. Ah! will you drive me mad? Shall I tear you to pieces to find out if there is a heart somewhere within you? [*Seizes her.*

LADY JESSICA [*struggling*]. Hush! some one coming.

[FALKNER *releases her.*

[SIR CHRISTOPHER *saunters in at back, smoking.*

[*Exit* LADY JESSICA.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Drop it, Ned! Drop it, my dear old boy! You're going too far.

FALKNER. We won't discuss the matter, Kit.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Yes, we will, Ned. George Nepean has been making a row, and I—well, I stroked him down. I said you were the soul of honour——

FALKNER. You were right. I am the soul of honour.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. And that you didn't mean anything by your attentions to Lady Jessica.

FALKNER. You were wrong. I do mean something.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well, what?

FALKNER. That's my business—and Lady Jessica's.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You forget—I introduced you here.

FALKNER. Thank you. You were very kind. [*Going off.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*stopping him*]. No, Ned; we'll have this out, here and now, please.

FALKNER [*angrily*]. Very well, let's have it out, here and now!

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*with great friendship*]. Come, old boy, there's no need for us to take this tone. Let's talk it over calmly, as old friends and men of the world.

FALKNER. Men of the world! If there is one beast in all the loathsome fauna of civilization that I hate and despise, it is a man of the world! Good heaven, what men! what a world!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Quite so, old fellow. It is a beastly bad world—a lying, selfish, treacherous world! A rascally bad world every way. But bad as it is, this old world hasn't lived all these thousands of years without getting a little common sense into its wicked old noddle—especially with regard to its love affairs. And, speaking as an average bad citizen of this blackguardly old world, I want to ask you, Ned Falkner, what the devil you mean by making love to a married woman, and what good or happiness you expect to get for yourself or her? Where does it lead? What's to be the end of it?

FALKNER. I don't know—I don't care! I love her!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. But, my good Ned, she's another man's wife.

FALKNER. She's married to a man who doesn't value her, doesn't understand her, is utterly unworthy of her.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. All women are married to men who are utterly unworthy of them—bless 'em! All women are undervalued by their husbands—bless 'em! All women are misunderstood—bless 'em again!

FALKNER. Oh, don't laugh it off like that. Look at that thick clown of a husband. They haven't a single idea, or thought, or taste in common.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. That's her look-out before she married him.

FALKNER. But suppose she didn't know, didn't understand. Suppose experience comes too late!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. It generally does—in other things besides marriage!

FALKNER. But doesn't it make your blood boil to see a woman sacrificed for life?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. It does—my blood boils a hundred times a day. But marriages are made in heaven, and if once we set to work to repair celestial mistakes and indiscretions we shall have our hands full. Come down to brass tacks. What's going to be the end of this?

FALKNER. I don't know—I don't care! I love her!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You don't know? I'll tell you. Let's go over all the possibilities of the case. [*Ticking them off on his fingers*] Possibility number one—you leave off loving her——

FALKNER. That's impossible.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Possibility number two—you can, one or the other, or both of you, die by natural means; but you're both confoundedly healthy, so I'm afraid there's no chance of that. Possibility number three—you can die together by poison, or steel, or cold Thames water. I wouldn't trust *you* not to do a fool's trick of that sort; but, thank God, she's got too much sense. By the way, Ned, I don't think she cares very much for you——

FALKNER. She will.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well, well, we shall see. Possibility number four—you can keep on dangling at her heels, and being made a fool of, without getting any—'forrarder.'

FALKNER. Mine is not a physical passion.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*looks at him for two moments*]. Oh, that be hanged!

FALKNER. I tell you it is not.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well, then, it ought to be.

FALKNER [*very angrily*]. Well, then, it is! And say no more about it. What business is it of yours?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*nonplussed*]. Possibility number five—a *liaison* with her husband's connivance. Gilbert Nepean won't make a *mari complaisant*. Dismiss that possibility.

FALKNER. Dismiss them all.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Don't you wish you could? But you'll have to face one of them, Ned. Possibility number six—a secret *liaison*. That's nearly impossible in society. And do you know what it means? It means in the end every inconvenience and disadvantage of marriage without any of its conveniences and advantages. It means endless discomfort, worry, and alarm. It means constant sneaking and subterfuges of the paltriest, pettiest kind. What do you say to that, my soul of honour?

FALKNER. I love her. I shall not try to hide my love.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, then, you want a scandal! You'll get it! Have you thought what sort of a scandal it will be? Remember you've stuck yourself on a pedestal, and put a moral toga on. That's awkward. It wants such a lot of living up to. Gilbert Nepean is a nasty cuss, and he'll make a nasty fuss. Possibility number seven, *tableau* one—Edward Falkner on his moral pedestal in a toga-esque attitude, honoured and idolized by the British public. [*Striking a heroic attitude*] *Tableau* two—horrible scandal, a field-day for Mrs Grundy; Edward Falkner is dragged from his pedestal, his toga is torn to pieces, his splendid reputation is blown to the winds, and he is rolled in the mud under the feet of the British public, who, six months ago, crowned him with garlands and shouted themselves hoarse in his praise. Are you prepared for that, my soul of honour?

FALKNER. If it comes.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*shakes his head, makes a wry face, then proceeds*]. Possibility number eight. Last remaining possibility, only possible possibility—pull yourself together, pack up your traps, start to-morrow morning for Africa or Kamschatka, Jericho or Hong-Kong. I'll go with you. What do you say?

FALKNER. No.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. No?

FALKNER. I wonder at you, Deering—I wonder at you coming to lecture me on love and morality.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Ah, why?

FALKNER [*with growing indignation*]. I love a woman with the deepest love of my heart, with the purest worship of my soul. If that isn't moral, if that isn't sacred, if that isn't righteous, tell me, in heaven's name, what is? And you come to lecture me with your cut-and-dried worldly-wise philosophy, your mean little maxims, you come to lecture me on love and morality—you!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Yes, I do! I may have had my attachments, I may have done this, that, and the other. I'm not a hero, I'm not on a pedestal, I never put on a moral toga. But I owe no woman a sigh or a sixpence. I've never wronged any man's sister, or daughter, or wife. And I tell you this, Ned Falkner, you're a fool if you think that anything can come of this passion of yours for Lady Jessica, except misery and ruin for her, embarrassment and disgrace for you, and kicking out of decent society for both of you.

FALKNER [*very firmly*]. Very well. And will you please be the first to cut me? Or shall I cut you?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You mean that, Ned?

FALKNER. Yes; if I'm a fool, leave me to my folly. [*Very strongly*] Don't meddle with me.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You do mean that, Ned? Our friendship is to end?

FALKNER. Yes.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Very well. You'll understand some day, Ned, that I couldn't see an old comrade, a man who stood shoulder to shoulder with me all these years—you'll understand I couldn't see him fling away honour, happiness, reputation, future, everything, without saying one word and trying to pull him up. Good-bye, old chap. [*Going off.*

[FALKNER *springs up generously, goes to him warmly, holding out both hands.*

FALKNER [*cries out*]. Kit!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Ned!

[*The two men stand with hands clasped for some time, then* FALKNER *speaks in a soft, low, broken voice.*

FALKNER. I love her, Kit—you don't know how much. When I see her, that turn of her head, that little toss of her curls, the little roguish face she makes—God couldn't make her like that and then blame a man for loving her! If He did—well, right or wrong, I'd rather miss heaven than one smile, one nod, one touch of her finger-tips!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, my poor dear old fellow, if you're as far gone as that, what the deuce am I to do with you?

[*Enter* BEATRICE EBERNOE, *a tall, dark woman, about thirty, very beautiful and spirituelle.*

BEATRICE. Ned, here's a messenger from the Colonial Office with a very urgent letter for you.

FALKNER. For me? [*Enter* SERVANT *bringing letter to* FALKNER.

SERVANT. Important, sir. The messenger is waiting in the hall for your answer.

FALKNER [*taking letter*]. Very well, I'll come to him. [*Exit* SERVANT. [*Reading letter*] More trouble out there. They want me to go out at once and negotiate. They think I could win over the chiefs and save a lot of bloodshed.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You'll go, Ned?

FALKNER. I don't know.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*to* BEATRICE]. Help me to persuade him.

BEATRICE. Can I? Have I any influence? Ned, for the sake of old days——

FALKNER. Ah, no—let me be—I must think this over.

[*Exit with distracted manner.*

BEATRICE. Have you spoken to him?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Yes; I gave him a thorough good slanging. Not a bit of use. When one of you holds us by a single hair, not all the King's horses and all the King's men can drag us back to that beggarly dusty old towpath of duty.

BEATRICE. I won't believe men are so weak.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Aren't we? There never was so sensible a man as I am in the management of other men's love affairs. You should have heard me lecture Ned. But once put me near you, and I'm every bit as bad as that poor fool I've been basting!

[*Indicating* FALKNER *by inclination of the head towards the direction he has gone.*

BEATRICE. Oh, no, Kit, I won't have you say that.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. But I am. How beautifully you played just now!

BEATRICE. Did I?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Don't do it again.

BEATRICE. Why not?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. It's taking an unfair advantage of me. You oughtn't to rouse those divine feelings in a man's heart. You oughtn't

to make me feel like a martyr, or a king, or a saint in a cathedral window, with all heaven's sunlight streaming through me! You oughtn't to do it! Because devil a ha'porth of a king, or a martyr, or a saint is there in me—and after you've been playing to me and lifted me into that seventh heaven of yours, I feel so mean and shabby when I drop down to earth again, and find myself a hard, selfish man of the world.

BEATRICE. Oh, I think there's a great deal of the martyr and saint and king in you.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Do you? I believe there is! I know there would be if you'd only screw me up to it—and keep me screwed up. Beatrice, there's nothing I couldn't do if you would only——

BEATRICE [*going away from him*]. Kit, you mustn't speak of this again. I can't quite forget.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. There's no need. While he was alive I never had one disloyal thought towards him. Now he's dead, who could be so fitted to take care of his dearest treasure as his oldest friend?

BEATRICE [*going away*]. I can't quite forget.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. But you're young. What do you mean to do with your life?

BEATRICE. I'd some thoughts of entering a sisterhood.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Ah, no! Surely there are plenty of dear, good, ugly women in the world who can do that.

BEATRICE. But I must enjoy the luxury of self-sacrifice. Tell me how I can drink the deepest of that cup.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Marry me. I'll give you the most splendid opportunities. Now, if you and I were to join our forces, and take our poor Ned in hand, and——

BEATRICE. Hush! [FALKNER *re-enters, evidently very much distracted.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*after a little pause, goes up to him*]. Well, Ned, what are you going to do?

FALKNER [*in an agony of indecision*]. I don't know! I don't know!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You'll go, Ned? I'll go with you!

[*Enter* LADY JESSICA *at back.*

BEATRICE. You'll go, Ned?

LADY JESSICA. Go? Where?

FALKNER. Nowhere. I shan't go, Kit. The man's waiting. I must give him my answer.

[*Exit left,* LADY JESSICA *looks after him.* SIR CHRISTOPHER *shrugs his shoulders at* BEATRICE.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Not all the King's horses, nor all the King's men.

# ACT II

SCENE: *Private sitting-room in the Star and Garter, Shepperford-on-Thames, a room in a small high-class riverside hotel, furnished in the usual incongruous hotel fashion. Large French windows both right and left take up a good part of the back of the stage, and open upon a veranda which runs along outside. The pillars and roof of the veranda are smothered with trails of flowers and creeping plants. Beyond the veranda and very near to it is the Thames with opposite bank. Door down stage right. A sofa down stage right. A sideboard left. On the sideboard plates, knives, forks, etc., dishes of fine peaches, grapes, and strawberries, and a bottle each of hock, claret, and champagne, as described in the text. A small table with writing materials at back between windows. A small table with white cloth laid, down stage, a little to the left of centre. A fireplace down stage left.*

*Discover* FALKNER *in evening dress and French* WAITER.

FALKNER. *Crème à la Reine.* We might have some trifle before the soup.

WAITER. Anchovy salad? Caviare?

FALKNER. Caviare.

WAITER. *Bien, m'sieu.* At what hour will m'sieu dine?

FALKNER. I don't know; I'm not sure that my friend will come at all. But tell the cook to have something prepared, so that we can have dinner very soon after my friend arrives.

WAITER. *Bien, m'sieu.*

FALKNER [*reading menu*]. Caviare. *Crème à la Reine. Rouget à l'Italienne.* Whitebait. *Petites timbales à la Lucullus. Mousse de foies gras en belle vue.* Is your cook equal to those *entrées*?

WAITER. Oh, sir, he is equal to anything. Trust to me, sir. The cook shall be *magnifique.* The dinner shall be *magnifique.*

FALKNER [*continuing*]. *Poulardes poêlées, sauce Arcadienne. Selle de mouton. Ortolans. Salade. Asperges en branches. Pouding mousseline, sauce églantine. Soufflé glacé à l'ananas.* Dessert. [WAITER *points to the dessert on the sideboard.*] And the wines?

WAITER [*pointing to the wines on the sideboard*]. Ayala, seventy-five. Johannesburg, sixty-eight. Château Haut-Brion, seventy-five. I have brought them from London myself. We have not these vintages here.

FALKNER. Good.

WAITER. It is but one friend that m'sieu expect?

FALKNER. Only one friend.

WAITER. *Bien, m'sieu.* [*Exit.*

[FALKNER *alone walks restlessly about the room for a few seconds, comes down; is arrested by something he hears outside the door, shows great delight.*

[*Re-enter* WAITER.

WAITER. A lady; she say will Mr Falkner please to see her? She have lost [*coughing*] her way.

FALKNER. Show her in.

[FALKNER *alone walks eagerly about room for a few seconds; his manner very eager and impatient, and quite different from what it had been before.*

[*Re-enter* WAITER, *showing in* LADY JESSICA *most charmingly and coquettishly dressed in summer outdoor clothes. She comes in rather tempestuously, speaking as she enters, and going up to* FALKNER.

LADY JESSICA [*all in a breath*]. Oh, my dear Mr Falkner, I've been staying with my cousin, and I was walking to the station, and by some unlucky chance I must have taken the wrong turning, for instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself here; and as I'm very hungry, would you think it very dreadful if I asked you to give me just a mere mouthful of dinner?

FALKNER [*intensely calm, low voice*]. I'm delighted. [*To* WAITER] Will you let us have dinner as soon as it is ready?

WAITER. In half an hour, sir. And the friend, sir?

FALKNER. The friend?

WAITER. The friend that m'sieu expect—the friend of the dinner?

FALKNER. Oh, yes—if he comes, show him in.

LADY JESSICA [*alarmed*]. You don't expect——

FALKNER [*glancing at* WAITER]. Hush!

WAITER [*absolutely impassive face*]. *Bien, m'sieu!* [*Exit.*

FALKNER. I'm so glad you've come. Look. [*Holding out his hand*] I'm trembling with delight. I knew you would be here.

LADY JESSICA. I'm sure you didn't, for I didn't know myself two hours ago. It was only by chance that I happened to take the wrong turning.

FALKNER. No; the right turning. And not by chance. It was not chance that brought you to me.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, please, not that strain. I can't play up to it. Sit down and let us discuss something mundane—say dinner.

FALKNER [*giving her the menu*]. I hope you'll like what I've ordered. I sent the waiter up to London for some of the dishes and the wines.

LADY JESSICA [*takes menu, looks at it, shows symptoms of great mock terror*]. What? You surely don't expect my poor little appetite to stand up to this dinner! Oh, let me be a warning to all, never to take the wrong turning when it may lead to a menu like this.

FALKNER. That's for your choice. You don't suppose I'd offer you anything but the very best?

LADY JESSICA. Yes, but a little of the very best is all I want; not all of it.

FALKNER. Take all of it that I can set before you.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, but think—there may be other deserving ladies in the world.

FALKNER. There is but you.

LADY JESSICA [*looks at him very much amused*]. And I came here to cure you of this folly. Ah, me! [*Reading the menu*] *Mousse de foies gras. Poulardes poêlées, sauce Arcadienne*—what is *sauce Arcadienne*?

FALKNER. I don't know. Love is the sauce of life. Perhaps it's that.

LADY JESSICA. Yes, but don't dish it up too often or too strong. It's sure to be wasted.

FALKNER. My love for you is not wasted.

LADY JESSICA. No?

FALKNER. You'll return it. You'll love me at last.

LADY JESSICA. Shall I? *Crème à la Reine. Rouget à l'Italienne.* And if I did, what then?

FALKNER. Join your life to mine. Come to Africa with me.

LADY JESSICA [*shakes her head*]. Impossible! We should only shock the British public. They wouldn't understand us. *Ortolans. Salade. Asperges en branches.* Besides, what would everybody say?

FALKNER. We shouldn't hear them.

LADY JESSICA. No; but they'd be talking all the same. Ha, ha! They'd call us the eloping philanthropists.

FALKNER. Would that matter?

LADY JESSICA. Oh, yes. A philanthropist may not elope. A tenor may. Doesn't it show the terrible irony there is in the heart of things, that the best-meaning philanthropist in the world may not elope with his neighbour's wife? *Pouding mousseline, sauce églantine.* What makes you so eager to go hunting slave-traders in Africa?

FALKNER. My father spent half his fortune putting slavery down. My grandfather spent half his life and died a pauper for the same cause.

LADY JESSICA. Well, then, you should send a subscription to the Aborigines' Protection Society. That is how I keep up our family traditions.

FALKNER. How?

LADY JESSICA. My father had a shocking reputation, and my grandfather, Beau Lillywhite—— Oh! [*Shrug.*] So I follow in their footsteps—at a respectful distance. I flirt with you. *Soufflé glacé à l'ananas.* There's no flirting in Central Africa, I suppose?

FALKNER. No flirting. Only heat and hunger and thirst, and helpless misery prolonged to a horrible death.

Lady Jessica [*genuinely moved*]. Oh, I'm so sorry! Don't think me heartless about *that*. Perhaps if I had lived amongst it as you have——

Falkner. Ah, if you had! you'd do as I ask you. You'd give all your heart to me, you'd give all your woman's care and tenderness to them, and you'd never hear one whisper of what people said of you.

Lady Jessica [*looking at him with real admiration*]. How earnest you are! How devoted!

[*Enter* Waiter *with knives and forks; he goes to table and begins laying it.*

Lady Jessica [*to* Waiter]. What is *sauce Arcadienne*?

Waiter. *Pardon!* The cook is splendid. He is *magnifique*—but he has [*gesture*] *renversé* the *sauce Arcadienne* all over the shop.

Falkner. It doesn't matter.

Lady Jessica. Oh, I had set my heart on *sauce Arcadienne.*

Falkner. The cook must make some more *sauce Arcadienne.*

Waiter. Ah, that is impossible till the middle of the night.

Lady Jessica. Ah, what a pity! It is the one thing I long for, *sauce Arcadienne.*

Falkner. Why?

Lady Jessica. Because I don't know what it is.

Waiter. He will give you some *sauce Marguerite.*

Lady Jessica. What is *sauce Marguerite*?

Waiter [*all the while laying table*]. Ah, it is *délicieuse.* It is the very best sauce that is in all the world.

Lady Jessica. *Va pour la sauce Marguerite!* Oh, this dinner!

Waiter. Ah, there is the beast of the organ-man.

Lady Jessica. No, let him be. I like music—and monkeys. [*To* Falkner] Tell them to make haste.

Falkner. Hurry the dinner.

Waiter. *Bien!* [*Exit.*

Lady Jessica [*taking out watch*]. Half-past seven. I've not an hour to stay.

Falkner. Yes, your life if you will.

Lady Jessica. Ah, no! You must be sensible. Think! what could come of it if I did love you? I should only break your heart or—what would be far worse—break my own.

Falkner. Break it, then—or let me break it. It's better to feel, it's better to suffer, than to be meanly happy. I love you, but I'd rather smother you in tears and blood than you should go on living this poor little heartless, withered life, choked up with all this dry Society dust. Oh, can't I make you feel? Can't I make you live? Can't I make you love me?

Lady Jessica [*after a moment's pause, looking at him with great admiration*]. Perhaps I do in my heart of hearts!

FALKNER. Ah! [*Springs to seize her; she struggles with him.*

LADY JESSICA. Mr Falkner! Mr Falkner! If you please Do you hear? Mr Falkner! [*Tears herself free.*] Will you please go and stop that horrid organ? Will you please?

[FALKNER *bows, exit at door.* LADY JESSICA *panting, flurried, out of breath, goes up to the window fanning herself with handkerchief, passes on to veranda, stays there for a few moments fanning herself, suddenly starts back alarmed, comes into room, stands frightened, listening.* GEORGE NEPEAN *appears on veranda, comes up to window, looks in.*

LADY JESSICA [*trying to appear indifferent*]. Ah, George!

GEORGE. I thought I caught sight of you. May I come in?

LADY JESSICA. Certainly.

GEORGE [*entering*]. I'm not intruding?

LADY JESSICA. Intruding? Oh, no. Have you heard from Gilbert?

GEORGE. Yes, I had a letter this morning. He may be back in two or three days.

LADY JESSICA [*embarrassed*]. Yes?

[*A pause. The organ outside stops in the middle of a bar.*

GEORGE [*glancing at table*]. You're dining here?

LADY JESSICA. Yes; just a small party. What brings you here?

GEORGE. I was going on to some friends at Hersham. I was waiting for the ferry when I caught sight of you. [*Glancing at table and sideboard*] You're giving your friends rather a good dinner.

LADY JESSICA. H'm, rather. I've heard the cooking's very good here. [*A little pause.*] There's a nest of cygnets outside. Have you seen them?

GEORGE. No.

LADY JESSICA. Do come and look at them; they are so pretty.

[*Going off at window followed by* GEORGE *when* FALKNER *enters at door. The two men look at each other.* LADY JESSICA *shows very great confusion and embarrassment. A long awkward pause.* GEORGE *looks very significantly at the sideboard and table.*

GEORGE [*to* LADY JESSICA]. Gilbert must know of this. You understand? [*Bows. Exit by window and veranda.*

LADY JESSICA [*who has stood very frightened and confused*]. Did you hear? What can I do? What can I do?

FALKNER [*calm, almost triumphant*]. You must join your life to mine now.

LADY JESSICA. No, no! If you wish me ever to have one kind thought of you, get me out of this! Do something, find somebody to dine with us. Understand me, I know myself, if this leads to a scandal, I shall hate you in a week. Oh, do something! do something!

FALKNER. Be calm. Be sure I'll do all I can to save you from a scandal. If that is impossible, be sure I'll do all I can to protect you from it.

LADY JESSICA. Ah, no! Save me from it. I can't face it. I can't give up my world, my friends. Oh, what can I do? I'll go back to town——

FALKNER. What good will that do? You had far better stay now. Sit down, be calm. Trust to me.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, you are good, and I'm such a coward.

FALKNER. Let us think what is the best thing to do.

LADY JESSICA. Can't we get somebody to dine with us?

LADY ROSAMUND [*heard outside*]. Oh, can't you wait, Freddie?

LADY JESSICA [*looking off*]. Hark! Rosy! [*Goes up to window.*

FREDDIE [*heard off*]. What! Row two more miles without a drink?

LADY JESSICA. She's there in a boat with Freddie and another man. The men are landing. If we could only get them to stay and dine with us! We must! Go and find George Nepean and bring him back here. Make haste. When you come back I'll have Rosy here.

FALKNER. In any case rely on me. I'm as firm as the earth beneath you. [*Exit.*

LADY JESSICA [*goes up to window*]. Rosy! Rosy! Come here! Yes, through there. Shush! [LADY ROSAMUND *appears in the veranda.*

LADY ROSAMUND. Jess! What's the matter? [*Entering room.*

LADY JESSICA. Everything. You and Freddie must stay and dine here.

LADY ROSAMUND. We can't, we're going on to dine with Mrs Crespin at her new place, and we've got Jack Symons with us.

LADY JESSICA. *Va pour* Jack Symons, whoever he may be! He must stay and dine too!

LADY ROSAMUND. Impossible. Mrs Crespin has asked some people to meet us. As her place is on the river Jack proposed we should row down and dress there. What are you doing here? I thought you were at Barbara's.

LADY JESSICA. I was going back to town to-night. I thought I'd walk to the station—it's so delightful across the fields. Well, you know the path, I went on all right till I came to those two turnings, and then—I must have taken the wrong one, for, instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself here.

LADY ROSAMUND. Well?

LADY JESSICA. I'd been wandering about for over an hour, I was very hungry; I remembered Mr Falkner was staying here; so I came in and asked him to give me some dinner.

LADY ROSAMUND. It was very foolish of you!

LADY JESSICA. Yes, especially as George Nepean was waiting for the ferry and caught sight of me on the veranda.

LADY ROSAMUND. George Nepean!

LADY JESSICA. He came in, saw Mr Falkner, put a totally wrong construction on it all, and threatened to let Gilbert know.

LADY ROSAMUND. How could you be so imprudent, Jess? You must have known that——

LADY JESSICA. Oh, don't stand there rowing me. Help me out of this and I promise you I won't get into another.

LADY ROSAMUND. Why didn't you explain to George how it happened?

LADY JESSICA. So I would. Only when he came in I was alone. I felt sure he would put a wrong construction on it, so I told him I was dining here with a little party—then Mr Falkner came in, and I was too confused to say anything. Besides, I couldn't very well tell him the truth, because——

LADY ROSAMUND. Because what?

LADY JESSICA. Well, it's very curious, but the last time I was staying with Barbara the very same thing happened.

LADY ROSAMUND. What?

LADY JESSICA. I was walking to the station, and I must have taken the wrong turning, for, instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself here.

LADY ROSAMUND. What, twice?

LADY JESSICA. Yes.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, impossible!

LADY JESSICA. No, it isn't; for it actually happened.

LADY ROSAMUND. Do you mean to tell me that you——

LADY JESSICA [*taking her up on the "tell"*]. Yes, I do. The sign-post is most deceptive.

LADY ROSAMUND. It must be.

LADY JESSICA. But the other time it was really a mistake, and I dined here all alone.

LADY ROSAMUND. Honour?

LADY JESSICA. Really, really honour!

LADY ROSAMUND. I cannot imagine how you, a woman of the world——

LADY JESSICA. Oh, do not nag me. Mr Falkner has gone for George. You must stay here and tell George you are dining with me.

LADY ROSAMUND. What about Freddie and Jack? See if they've come back to the boat.

LADY JESSICA [*looking off at window*]. Not yet. Here's Mr Falkner—alone. [*Re-enter* FALKNER *at window.*] Well, where is he?

FALKNER [*to* LADY ROSAMUND]. How d'ye do? [*To* LADY JESSICA] He took a fly that was waiting outside and drove to the post-office. I went there and made inquiries. He stopped, sent off a telegram——

LADY JESSICA. That must have been to Gilbert.

FALKNER. Then he drove off towards Staines. Shall I follow him?

LADY JESSICA. Yes. No. What's the use? He may be anywhere by this.

LADY ROSAMUND. Besides we can't stay to dinner.

LADY JESSICA. You must—you must! I must be able to tell Gilbert that somebody dined with me.

LADY ROSAMUND. Jess, I'll write to George when I get back to-night, and tell him that I dined with you here.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, you good creature! No! Write now, on the hotel paper. Then he'll see you were actually here.

LADY ROSAMUND. Pens, ink, and paper.

FALKNER [*at table up stage*]. Here!

LADY JESSICA. Rosy, I've got a better plan than that.

LADY ROSAMUND. What?

LADY JESSICA. Could you be in town to-morrow morning?

LADY ROSAMUND. Yes—why?

LADY JESSICA. Write to George to call on you there. I'll drop in a little before he comes. Then we can see what frame of mind he is in, and explain things accordingly. We can manage him so much better between us.

LADY ROSAMUND. Very well, make haste. Mr Falkner, will you go into the bar, run up against my husband and his friend, and keep them busy there till I get back into the boat?

FALKNER. Very well. [*Exit.*

LADY ROSAMUND. Now, what shall I say?

LADY JESSICA [*dictating*]. "My dear George——"

LADY ROSAMUND [*writing*]. "My dear George——" Oh, this pen! [*Throws away the pen, takes up another, tries it.*

LADY JESSICA. We must make it very short and casual, as if you didn't attach much importance to it.

LADY ROSAMUND [*throws away second pen*]. That's as bad!

LADY JESSICA [*taking out a gold stylograph, giving it to* LADY ROSAMUND]. Here's my stylograph. Take care of it. It was a birthday present.

LADY ROSAMUND. "Monday evening. My dear George——"

LADY JESSICA [*dictating*]. "Jess has told me that you have just been here and that you were surprised at her presence. She fears you may have put a wrong construction on what you saw. She was too flurried at the moment to explain. But if you will call on me to-morrow morning, at Cadogan Gardens at"—what time will suit you?

LADY ROSAMUND. Twelve?

LADY JESSICA. Yes, and I'll be there a few minutes before.

LADY ROSAMUND [*writing*]. "Twelve."

LADY JESSICA [*dictating*]. "I will give you a full explanation. You will then see how very simple the whole affair was, and how little cause you had for your suspicions of her." That will do, won't it?

LADY ROSAMUND. Yes, I think. "Yours sincerely"—no, "Yours affectionately, Rosy."

LADY JESSICA. "*P.S.* You had perhaps better say nothing about this to Gilbert until after we have met. When you see how trifling the matter is you can tell Gilbert or not, as you please."

LADY ROSAMUND [*writing*]. "As you please. George Nepean, Esquire." What's his number?

LADY JESSICA. Two-twenty.

LADY ROSAMUND [*writing*]. "Two-twenty, Sloane Street."

LADY JESSICA. What about Freddie? Shall we tell him?

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, no! I wouldn't trust my Freddie in a matter of this kind. He'd put a wrong construction on it—men always do.

[*Puts letter in envelope, seals it.*

LADY JESSICA. But if George asks him?

LADY ROSAMUND. Freddie won't come up to town to-morrow. We'll see how George takes it, and we'll keep Freddie out of it, if we can. [*She has risen, leaving stylograph on writing-table, where it remains. She seals letter.*] Stamp?

LADY JESSICA. I've got one in my purse.

LADY ROSAMUND [*has caught sight of the menu, has taken it up*]. Jess, you'll go straight to the station now?

LADY JESSICA. Yes, I'm awfully hungry——

LADY ROSAMUND. Yes, but I don't think this dinner would agree with you. [*Puts the menu down significantly.*

LADY JESSICA. Very well. But I am hungry.

LADY ROSAMUND. And Jess, if I get you out of this—you won't take the wrong turning again?

LADY JESSICA. No! no!

LADY ROSAMUND. Honour?

LADY JESSICA. Honour! Really honour! Rosy, you know this is only a silly freak—nothing more.

LADY ROSAMUND. I may be sure of that, Jess? Honour?

LADY JESSICA. Honour! Really, really honour!

LADY ROSAMUND [*kisses her*]. I must be going. To-morrow!

LADY JESSICA. To-morrow at Cadogan Gardens, ten minutes to twelve.

LADY ROSAMUND [*at window*]. Those men are in the boat. My Freddie is looking for me. What shall I tell him? [*Exit at window.*

[*Enter* WAITER.

LADY JESSICA [*giving letter*]. Please get that posted at once.

WAITER [*taking letter*]. *Bien, madame.* [*Exit with letter.*

[*Re-enter* FALKNER *at window.*

LADY JESSICA. They've gone?

FALKNER. Yes. What have you done?

LADY JESSICA. Rosy has written to George to come and see her to-morrow morning at Cadogan Gardens. You had better come too.

FALKNER. At what time?

LADY JESSICA. Say a quarter to one. George will have gone by then, and we can tell you if he accepts our explanation.

FALKNER. What is the explanation to be?

LADY JESSICA. That Rosy and I were dining together here, that she hadn't arrived, that you happened to come into the room, and that George saw you and put a wrong construction on it. That will be all right, won't it?

FALKNER. Yes—I dare say. I wish it had been possible to tell the truth.

LADY JESSICA. The truth? What truth? Rosy was actually here, and she *might* have stayed and dined with me—only she didn't—and—well, if it isn't the truth, it's only a little one.

FALKNER. I think those things are all the same size.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, please don't be disagreeable, just at our last moment too.

FALKNER. Our last moment! Ah, no, no, no! [*Approaching her.*

LADY JESSICA. Ah, yes, yes, yes! I promised Rosy I'd go straight to the station——

FALKNER. There's no train till eight-fifty. What harm can there be in your staying to dinner now?

LADY JESSICA. I promised Rosy I wouldn't. I'm fearfully hungry——

[*Enter* WAITER *with letter on salver.*

WAITER [*advancing with letter on salver to* LADY JESSICA]. Pardon, is this letter for madame?

LADY JESSICA [*takes letter, shows fright*]. Yes. Excuse me. Who brought it? [*Opens letter, takes out telegram.*

WAITER. She is here in the passage.

LADY JESSICA [*opens telegram; shows great alarm. Calls*]. Ferris.

FERRIS [*coming to door*]. Yes, my lady.

LADY JESSICA. Come in.

WAITER. *Bien, madame.* [*Exit.*

LADY JESSICA. When did this telegram come?

FERRIS. This afternoon, my lady. The moment I got in Mr Rawlins said to me, "Mr Nepean is coming back to-night; I've just had a telegram from him to get his room ready. And I expect this telegram is for her ladyship," he said, and he gave me that telegram, and I said, "I expect it is." "What time will her ladyship be back to-night?" he said. "I don't know," I said. "Where is her ladyship now?" he said. "I don't know," I said.

LADY JESSICA. You didn't know?

FERRIS. No, my lady.

LADY JESSICA. Then why did you come here?

FERRIS [*confused*]. The other night when I was bringing your lady ship's shawl to the tent, I happened to hear you mention this hotel I didn't think anything of it, your ladyship, and I didn't in the leas expect to find you here, I assure your ladyship. But I thought you ladyship would like to be apprised that Mr Nepean was coming hom to-night, and so I came, as I may say by pure chance, my lady; jus as you might have come yourself, my lady.

LADY JESSICA. Quite right, Ferris. [*To* FALKNER] Mr Nepean i coming home to-night. He reaches Paddington at ten.

FERRIS. I've got a cab outside, my lady, and I've looked out th trains. If we make haste, we can drive over to Walton and just catc a train there. But we haven't a moment to spare.

LADY JESSICA. Come, then.

FERRIS. I hope I've done right, my lady?

LADY JESSICA. Quite right, Ferris. No. Please don't trouble t come out, I'd rather you didn't. Rosy and I will dine with you som other night. [*Exit* FERRIS.] Good night.

FALKNER. And to-morrow?

LADY JESSICA. To-morrow? [*Grimace.*] *Petits rows conjugals, sau tartare.* [*Exit at doo*

[*Enter* WAITER *with two little morsels of caviar*

FALKNER. What's that?

WAITER. Caviare on toast, sir.

FALKNER. Hang the caviare! Bring in the soup.

WAITER. Ah, it is not yet ready, two, three minutes. I am ver sorry, but the cook say the *sauce Marguerite*——

FALKNER. What about it?

WAITER. It will not be made.

FALKNER. Very well.

WAITER. And the *salade*?

FALKNER. What about the salad?

WAITER. Will m'sieu mix it?

FALKNER. No; mix it yourself.

WAITER. *Bien, m'sieu.*

FALKNER. Waiter!

WAITER. Sir!

FALKNER [*pointing to the cover laid for* LADY JESSICA]. Take tho confounded things away.

WAITER. Sir!

FALKNER. Take those confounded things away; I'm going to dine alon

WAITER. *Bien, m'sieu.*

[*Takes up the things, the second cover, and the one plate caviare, leaving the other on the table in* FALKNER'S *plac Is going off with them.*

FALKNER. Bring in the soup.

WAITER. *Bien, m'sieu.*

[*Exit with things.* SIR CHRISTOPHER'S *voice heard outside.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Mr Falkner?

WAITER. Yes, sir. In number ten, sir.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Has he dined?

WAITER. Not yet, sir. What name, sir?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, never mind my name. Show me in.

WAITER [*at door, announcing*]. The friend of the dinner.

[*Enter* SIR CHRISTOPHER *in morning dress.*

[*Exit* WAITER.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*very cordially*]. Ah, dear old boy, here you are. [*Shaking hands cordially*] All alone?

FALKNER [*very sulky*]. Yes.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*looking at table*]. You haven't dined?

FALKNER. No.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. That's all right. I'll join you. What's the matter?

FALKNER. Nothing.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Nothing?

FALKNER [*very sulky throughout*]. No. What should be?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You look upset.

FALKNER. Not at all.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. That's all right. [*Going up to table very ravenously*] I say, old chap, dinner won't be long, eh?

FALKNER. No, why?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I'm famished. I was over at Hounslow. I had no end of work to get through, so I stuck to it. I've had nothing but a biscuit and a glass of sherry since breakfast. I was going up to town for dinner, then I remembered you wrote to me from here; so I thought I'd run over on the chance of finding you. And here you are. [*Cordially*] Well, how are you?

FALKNER. I'm very well.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. That's all right. And, and—old fellow—about the lady?

FALKNER. What about her?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You're going to behave like a good true fellow and give her up, eh?

FALKNER. Yes, I suppose.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. That's all right. Love 'em, worship 'em, make the most of 'em! Go down on your knees every day and thank God for having sent them into this dreary world for our good and comfort. But don't break your heart over 'em! Don't ruin your career for 'em! Don't lose a night's rest for 'em! They're not worth it—except one! [*Very softly.*

FALKNER [*same sulky mood*]. You're full of good advice.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. It's the only thing I am full of. I say, old fellow, could you hurry them up with the dinner?

[FALKNER *goes and rings bell.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*casually taking up the menu*]. No, Ned; they're not worth it, bless their hearts. And the man who—— [*Suddenly stops, his face illuminated with delighted surprise.*] Ned!

FALKNER. What?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*pointing to menu*]. This isn't the menu for to-night?

FALKNER. Yes.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*incredulously*]. No! Dear old fellow! [*Looking at him with great admiration*] Dear old fellow! I say, Ned, you do yourself very well when you're all alone.

FALKNER. Why shouldn't I?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Why shouldn't you? Why shouldn't you?

[*Perusing menu.*

FALKNER. Why shouldn't I? Excuse me a moment.

[*Exit at door.* SIR CHRISTOPHER, *left alone, reads over the menu, showing great satisfaction, then goes up to sideboard, takes up the bottles of wine, looks at them, shows great satisfaction, rubs his hands, brings down champagne, places it right of table, ditto hock, places it left of table, brings down claret, looks at brand, hugs it delightedly; sits on table, puts claret down, picks up stylo. pen, reads inscription, coming down, then goes to window, looks off, gives a sigh, comes down, puts pen in waistcoat-pocket. Enter* WAITER.

WAITER [*putting soup on table*]. Mr Falkner says will you please excuse him? He has gone to London just now, this minute.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Gone to London!

WAITER. On very important business. He say will you please make yourself at home with the dinner?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*puzzled*]. Gone to London! What on earth—— [*Resolutely and instantly takes seat at head of table.*] Serve up the dinner! Sharp!

WAITER. Caviare on toast?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, damn the caviare! Open the champagne!

[*Takes the morsel of caviare and throws it down his throat; helps himself to soup, peppers it vigorously, meantime* WAITER *opens champagne and pours out a glass.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. The fish! Quick! and the *entrées*, bring them both up at the same time—bring up the whole bag of tricks!!

[SIR CHRISTOPHER *throws spoonful after spoonful of soup down his throat. The organ outside strikes up in the middle of the bar at which it left off, a very rowdy street tune.*

# ACT III

SCENE: LADY ROSAMUND'S *drawing-room, Cadogan Gardens, a very elegant modern apartment, furnished in good taste. Door at back. Door right. Large bow window forming an alcove up stage right. Fireplace left.* LADY ROSAMUND *discovered in outdoor morning dress.* FOOTMAN *showing in* LADY JESSICA *at back.*

FOOTMAN [*announces*]. Lady Jessica Nepean. [*Exit* FOOTMAN.

LADY ROSAMUND. Well, dear?

LADY JESSICA [*kisses* LADY ROSAMUND *very affectionately*]. Oh, Rosy——

LADY ROSAMUND. What's the matter?

LADY JESSICA. Directly you had gone Ferris came in with a telegram from Gilbert, saying he was coming home last night. Of course I flew back to town. When I got there I found a later telegram saying he hadn't been able to finish his business, and that he would come back to-day.

LADY ROSAMUND [*taking letter from pocket*]. He reaches Paddington at twelve.

LADY JESSICA. How do you know?

LADY ROSAMUND [*giving letter*]. Read that.

LADY JESSICA [*looking at handwriting*]. From George Nepean.

LADY ROSAMUND. Yes. He came here an hour ago to see me, and left that note. I'm afraid George means to be very horrid.

LADY JESSICA [*reading*]. "Dear Lady Rosamund, I shall, of course, be quite ready to listen to any explanation you may have to offer. I will come back to Cadogan Gardens on my return from Paddington. I am now on my way there to meet Gilbert, who arrives from Devon at twelve. It is only fair to tell you that on leaving Lady Jessica last evening I telegraphed him I had a most serious communication to make to him, and that on his arrival I shall tell him exactly what I saw." George does mean to be horrid. [*Retaining letter.*

LADY ROSAMUND. I cannot imagine how you——

LADY JESSICA. Oh, do not preach. I tell you it was the sign-post. It is most deceptive.

LADY ROSAMUND. It must be. The next time you come to that sign-post——

LADY JESSICA. I shall know which turning to take! You needn't fear.

LADY ROSAMUND. My Freddie's in a small fever.

LADY JESSICA. What about?

LADY ROSAMUND. My coming up to town this morning.

LADY JESSICA. You're sure he'll stay down there? He won't come up and—interfere?

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, no, poor old dear! I snubbed him thoroughly and left him grizzling in his tent, like Achilles. He'll stay there all day, fuming and trying to screw up his courage to have a tremendous row with me when I get back to dinner this evening. I know my Freddie so well! [FREDDIE *saunters in at back, half timid, half defiant.* [*Looking at him with amused surprise*] Hillo, my friend! Hillo!

FREDDIE [*very severe and dignified, takes no notice of her*]. How do, Jess?

[LADY JESSICA *alternately reads* GEORGE'S *letter and looks at* FREDDIE.

LADY ROSAMUND. What has brought you to town?

FREDDIE. I came up with a purpose.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, don't say that. People are always so horrid who do things with a purpose.

FREDDIE. I came up with Mrs Crespin. She has lost the address of the cook that you gave her last evening. I told her you were in town. She will call here for it.

LADY ROSAMUND [*sweetly*]. Very well.

FREDDIE. Do you intend to stay in or go out this morning?

LADY ROSAMUND. That depends. I may stay in—or I may go out. What are you going to do?

FREDDIE. That depends. I may stay in—or—I may go out.

LADY ROSAMUND. Very well, dear, do as you please. I'll take the alternative. [*To* LADY JESSICA] Come and take your things off in my room.

LADY JESSICA [*glancing at* FREDDIE]. But don't you think——

FREDDIE [*with great dignity*]. I have come up to town this morning, because for the future I intend to place everything in this house on a new basis, an entirely opposite basis from that on which it now stands.

LADY ROSAMUND. You're going to turn all the furniture upside-down! Oh, I wouldn't!

FREDDIE. Hitherto I have been content to be a cipher in this establishment. I will be a cipher no longer.

LADY ROSAMUND. No, I wouldn't. Come along, Jess!

LADY JESSICA. But——

LADY ROSAMUND. We'll talk it over upstairs. Run away to your club, Freddie, and think over what figure you would like to be. I dare say we can arrange it.

[*Exit* LADY ROSAMUND, *right, taking off* LADY JESSICA, *and closing the door rather sharply behind her.*

FREDDIE [*left alone, marches up to the door, calls out in a forcible-feeble*

*scream*]. I will not be a cipher! I will not be a cipher! [*Comes to centre of stage, gesticulates, his lips moving, sits down very resolutely, and then says in a tone of solemn conviction*] I will *not* be a cipher!

[*Enter* FOOTMAN, *announcing.*

FOOTMAN. Sir Christopher Deering! [*Enter* SIR CHRISTOPHER.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*shaking hands*]. I've just come on from Lady Jessica's. They told me I should find her here.

FREDDIE. She's upstairs with my wife.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Can I see her for a few minutes?

FREDDIE. I don't know. Deering, old fellow, we're tiled in, aren't we? If I ask your advice——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Certainly, Freddie. What is it?

FREDDIE. I've been married for seven years——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Seven years, is it? It doesn't seem so long.

FREDDIE. Oh, doesn't it? Yes, it does. Rosy and I have never quite hit it off from the first.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. No? How's that?

FREDDIE. I don't know. When I want to do anything she doesn't. When I want to go anywhere she won't. When I like anybody she hates them. And when I hate anybody she likes them. And—well—there it is in a nutshell.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Hum! I should humour her a little, Freddie—let her have her own way. Try kindness.

FREDDIE. Kindness? I tell you this, Deering, kindness is a grand mistake. And I made that grand mistake at starting. I began with riding her on the snaffle. I ought to have started on the curb, eh?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well, there's something to be said for that method in some cases. Kindness won't do, you say? Why not try firmness?

FREDDIE. I have.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well?

FREDDIE. Well, firmness is all very well, but there's one great objection to firmness.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. What's that?

FREDDIE. It leads to such awful rows, and chronic rowing does upset me so. After about two days of it I feel so seedy and shaky and nervous I don't know what to do. [*Has a sudden wrathful outburst.*] And she comes up as smiling as ever!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Poor old fellow!

FREDDIE. I say, Deering, what would you advise me to do?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well, it requires some consideration——

FREDDIE [*with deep conviction*]. You know, Deering, there must be some way of managing them.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. One would think so. There must be some way of managing them!

FREDDIE [*has another wrathful outburst*]. And I used to go and wait outside her window, night after night, for hours! What do you think of that?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I should say it was time very badly laid out.

FREDDIE [*pursuing his reminiscences*]. Yes, and caught a chill on my liver and was laid up for six weeks.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Poor old fellow!

FREDDIE. I say, Deering, what would you do?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well—well—it requires some consideration.

FREDDIE [*walking about*]. You know, Deering, I may be an ass——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh!

FREDDIE [*firmly*]. Yes. I may be an ass, but I'm not a *silly* ass. I may be a fool, but I'm not a *d—ee—d* fool! Now, there's something going on this morning between Rosamund and Jess. They're hobnobbing and whispering, and when two of 'em get together——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, my dear fellow, when two women get together, do you think it can ever be worth a man's while to ask what nonsense or mischief they're chattering? By the way, did you say that I could see Lady Jessica?

FREDDIE. She's upstairs with Rosy. I'll send her to you. Deering, if you were married, would you be a cipher in your own house?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Not if I could help it.

FREDDIE [*very determinedly*]. Neither will I. [*Exit.*

[SIR CHRISTOPHER, *left alone, takes out the stylograph and looks at it carefully. In a few seconds enter* LADY JESSICA, *right. As she enters he drops left hand which holds the stylograph.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. How d'ye do?

LADY JESSICA. How d'ye do? You wish to see me?

[SIR CHRISTOPHER *presents the stylograph,* LADY JESSICA *shows alarm.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I see from the inscription that this belongs to you.

LADY JESSICA [*taking stylograph*]. Where did you find it?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. In a private sitting-room at the Star and Garter at Shepperford.

LADY JESSICA. I must have left it there some time ago. I could not imagine where I had lost it. Thank you so much.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Pray don't mention it. [*An awkward pause.*] Good morning.

LADY JESSICA. Good morning. [SIR CHRISTOPHER *has got to door at back.*] Sir Christopher—— [SIR CHRISTOPHER *stops.*] You were at Shepperford——?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Last evening.

LADY JESSICA. Pretty little spot.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Charming.

LADY JESSICA. And a very good hotel?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. First class. Such splendid cooking!

LADY JESSICA. The cooking's good, is it?—oh, yes, I dined there once, some time ago.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I dined there last night.

LADY JESSICA. Did you? At the *table d'hôte*?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. No, in a private sitting-room. Number ten.

LADY JESSICA. With a friend, I suppose?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. No. All alone.

LADY JESSICA. All alone? In number ten?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. All alone. In number ten.

LADY JESSICA. I suppose you—I suppose——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Suppose nothing except that I had a remarkably good dinner, that I picked up that stylograph and brought it up to town with me last night. And there is an end of the whole matter, I assure you. Good morning.

LADY JESSICA. Good morning. Sir Christopher—you—[SIR CHRISTOPHER *is again arrested at door*] you—a—— I may trust you?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. If I can help you—yes.

LADY JESSICA. Nothing—nothing is known about my being there?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Your being there?

LADY JESSICA [*after a pause—embarrassed*]. I was to have dined in number ten.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. All alone?

LADY JESSICA [*same embarrassed manner*]. No—with Mr Falkner. I was coming up to town from my cousin's. I started to walk to the station. I must have taken the wrong turning, for instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself at the Star and Garter. I was very hungry and I asked Mr Falkner to give me a mere mouthful of dinner.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. A mere mouthful.

LADY JESSICA. And then George Nepean caught sight of me, came in, saw Mr Falkner, and telegraphed my husband that I—of course Gilbert will believe the worst, and I—oh, I don't know what to do!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Can I be of any service?

LADY JESSICA. How would you advise me to—to get out of it?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Let us go over the various possibilities of the case. There are only two.

LADY JESSICA. What are they?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Possibility number one—get out of it by telling fibs. Possibility number two—get out of it by telling the truth. Why not possibility number two?

LADY JESSICA. Oh, I couldn't!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Couldn't what?

LADY JESSICA. Tell my husband that I was going to dine with Mr Falkner.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. But it was quite by accident?

LADY JESSICA. Oh, quite!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Eh!

LADY JESSICA. Quite!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well——?

LADY JESSICA. But if Gilbert made inquiries——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well?

LADY JESSICA. It was such a very good dinner that Mr Falkner ordered.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. It was! But if he didn't expect you, why did he order that very excellent dinner?

LADY JESSICA. I'm sure you ought to be the last person to ask that, for it seems you ate it.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I did.

LADY JESSICA. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I'm not grumbling at the wind, or at the dinner, but if I'm to help you out of this, you had better tell me all the truth. Especially as I'm not your husband. Now, frankly, is this a mere indiscretion or——?

LADY JESSICA. A mere indiscretion, nothing more. Honour—really, really honour.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. A mere indiscretion that will never be repeated?

LADY JESSICA. A mere indiscretion that will never be repeated. You believe me?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*looking at her*]. Yes, I believe you, and I'll help you.

LADY JESSICA. Thank you! Thank you!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Now, did Falkner expect you?

LADY JESSICA. He ought not.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. He ought not. But he did.

LADY JESSICA. I told him I shouldn't come.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Which was exactly the same as telling him you would.

LADY JESSICA. Have you seen Mr Falkner?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Only for a minute just before dinner. He came up to town.

LADY JESSICA. Without any dinner?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Without any dinner. To come back to these two possibilities.

LADY JESSICA Yes, Rosy and I have decided on—on——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. On possibility number one, tell a fib. I put that possibility first out of natural deference and chivalry towards ladies. The only objection I have to telling fibs is that you get found out.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, not always.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Eh!

LADY JESSICA. I mean, if you arrange things not perhaps exactly as they were, but as they ought to have been.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I see. In that way a lie becomes a sort of idealized and essential truth——

LADY JESSICA. Yes. Yes——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I'm not a good hand at—idealizing.

LADY JESSICA. Ah, but then you're a man! No, I can't tell the truth. Gilbert would never believe me. Would you—after that dinner?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. The dinner would be some tax on my digestion.

[LADY ROSAMUND *enters right, followed by* FREDDIE, *with a self-important and self-assertive air.*

LADY ROSAMUND. Good morning, Sir Christopher.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*shaking hands*]. Good morning, Lady Rosamund.

LADY ROSAMUND. Jess, I've had to tell Freddie.

LADY JESSICA. And I've had to tell Sir Christopher. He was at Shepperford last evening, and he has promised to help us.

FREDDIE. I must say, Jess, that I think you have behaved—well—in a—confounded silly way.

LADY JESSICA. That is perfectly understood.

FREDDIE [*solemnly*]. When a woman once forgets what is due——

LADY JESSICA. Oh, don't moralize! Rosy, Sir Christopher, do ask him not to improve the occasion.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. The question is, Freddie, whether you will help us in getting Lady Jessica out of this little difficulty.

FREDDIE. Well, I suppose I must join in.

LADY JESSICA. Now, Rosy, do you fully understand——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I don't think I do. What is the exact shape which possibility number one has taken—or is going to take?

LADY ROSAMUND. Jess and I had arranged to have a little *tête-à-tête* dinner at Shepperford. Jess got there first. I hadn't arrived. George saw Jess at the window, and came in. At that moment Mr Falkner happened to come into the room, and Jess, knowing that appearances were against her, was confused, and couldn't on the spur of the moment give the right explanation.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I suppose the waiter will confirm that right explanation?

LADY JESSICA. The waiter? I hadn't thought of that. Waiters will confirm anything, won't they? Couldn't you settle with the waiter?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well, I——

LADY JESSICA. You did have the dinner, you know!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Very well. I'll settle with the waiter.

[*Enter* FOOTMAN.

FOOTMAN [*announcing*]. Mrs Crespin! [*Enter* MRS CRESPIN.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.

MRS CRESPIN [*shows a little surprise at seeing them all, then goes very affectionately to* LADY ROSAMUND]. Good morning, dear. Good morning, Sir Christopher. [SIR CHRISTOPHER *bows. To* FREDDIE] I've seen you. [*Goes to* LADY JESSICA.] Good morning, dearest. [*Kisses her.*

LADY JESSICA. Good morning, dearest. [*Kisses her.*

MRS CRESPIN [*to* LADY JESSICA. *Looking anxiously at her*]. You're looking pale and worried.

LADY JESSICA. Me? Oh, no, I'm sure I don't, do I?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Not to masculine eyes.

MRS CRESPIN [*to* LADY ROSAMUND]. Dear, I've lost the address of that cook. Would you mind writing it out again?

LADY ROSAMUND. Certainly. [*Goes to writing-table and writes.*

MRS CRESPIN [*to* LADY JESSICA]. What's the matter with our dear friend George Nepean?

LADY JESSICA. Matter?

MRS CRESPIN. I ran against him in a post-office on my way from Paddington just now.

LADY JESSICA. Yes?

MRS CRESPIN. Your husband is quite well, I hope?

LADY JESSICA. My husband? Oh, quite! He always is quite well. Why?

MRS CRESPIN. George Nepean seemed so strange.

LADY JESSICA. How?

MRS CRESPIN. He said he was going to Paddington to meet your husband—and he made so much of it.

LADY JESSICA. Ah! You see, my husband is a big man, so naturally George would make much of it.

MRS CRESPIN. I always used to go to the station to meet my husband —when I had one.

LADY JESSICA [*a little triumphantly*]. Ah, Rosy and I know better than to kill our husbands with too much kindness.

MRS CRESPIN. Still, I think husbands need a little pampering——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Not at all. The brutes are so easily spoilt. A little overdose of sweetness, a little extra attention from a wife to her husband, and life is never the same again!

FREDDIE [*who has been waiting eagerly to get a word in*]. I suppose you didn't mention anything to George Nepean about our dining with you last evening?

MRS CRESPIN [*alert*]. Did I? Let me see! Yes! Yes! I did mention that you were over. Why? [*They all look at each other.*

FREDDIE. Oh, nothing, nothing!

MRS CRESPIN. I'm so sorry. Does it matter much?

LADY JESSICA. Not in the least.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, not in the least.

FREDDIE. Not in the least.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Not at all.

MRS CRESPIN. I'm afraid I made a mistake.

LADY ROSAMUND. How?

MRS CRESPIN. Your husband——

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, my dear, what does it matter what my Freddie says or does or thinks, eh, Freddie? [*Frowning angrily aside at* FREDDIE. There's the address of the cook.

[*Giving the paper on which she has been writing.*

MRS CRESPIN. Thank you so much. Good morning, dearest. [*Kiss.*

LADY ROSAMUND. Good morning, dearest. [*Kiss.*

MRS CRESPIN [*going to* LADY JESSICA]. Good-bye, dearest. [*Kiss.*

LADY JESSICA. Good-bye, dearest. [*Kiss.*

MRS CRESPIN [*very sweetly, shaking hands*]. Good-bye, Sir Christopher.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Good-bye.

MRS CRESPIN. You are quite sure that I didn't make a mistake in telling George Nepean that Lady Rosy and Mr Tatton dined with me last evening?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. It was the truth, wasn't it?

MRS CRESPIN. Of course it was.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. One never makes a mistake in speaking the truth.

MRS CRESPIN. Really? That's a very sweeping assertion to make.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I base it on my constant experience—and practice.

MRS CRESPIN. You find it always answers to tell the truth?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Invariably.

MRS CRESPIN. I hope it will in this case. Good-bye! Good-bye! Good-bye!

[*Exit* MRS CRESPIN. *They all stand looking at each other, nonplussed,* SIR CHRISTOPHER *slightly touching his head with perplexed gesture.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Our fib won't do.

LADY ROSAMUND. Freddie, you incomparable nincompoop!

FREDDIE. I like that! If I hadn't asked her, what would have happened? George Nepean would have come in, you'd have plumped down on him with your lie, and what then? Don't you think it's jolly lucky I said what I did?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. It's lucky in this instance. But if I am to embark

any further in these imaginative enterprises, I must ask you, Freddie, to keep a silent tongue.

FREDDIE. What for?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well, old fellow, it may be an unpalatable truth to you, but you'll never make a good liar.

FREDDIE. Very likely not. But if this sort of thing is going on in my house, I think I ought to.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, do subside, Freddie, do subside!

LADY JESSICA. Yes, George—and perhaps Gilbert—will be here directly. Oh, will somebody tell me what to do?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. We have tried possibility number one. It has signally failed. Why not possibility number two?

LADY JESSICA. Tell the truth? My husband would never believe it! Besides, he threatened that he wouldn't spare me. And he won't. No! No! No! Somebody dined with me last night, or was going to dine with me, and that somebody was a woman. [*Enter* FOOTMAN.

FOOTMAN [*announcing*]. Mrs Coke! [*Enter* DOLLY.

DOLLY [*going to* LADY ROSAMUND]. Ah, my dear Lady Rosamund—— [*Exit* FOOTMAN.

LADY JESSICA [*goes affectionately and a little hysterically to her*]. Dolly! How good of you! [*Kissing her.*

DOLLY. What's the matter?

LADY JESSICA. Dolly, you dined with me, or were going to dine with me at the Star and Garter at Shepperford last evening. Don't say you can't, and didn't, for you must and did!

DOLLY. Of course I'll say anything that's—necessary.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, you treasure!

DOLLY. But I don't understand——

[LADY JESSICA *takes her aside and whispers eagerly.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*glancing at* LADY JESSICA *and* DOLLY]. Possibility number one—with variations. I'm not required any further.

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, Sir Christopher, you won't desert us?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Certainly not, if I can be of any use. But if this is to be a going concern, don't you think the fewer partners the better?

LADY ROSAMUND. Oh, don't go. You can help us so much.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. How?

LADY ROSAMUND. Your mere presence will be an immense moral support to us.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*uncomfortable*]. Thank you! Thank you!

LADY ROSAMUND. You can come to our assistance whenever we are in the lurch, corroborate us whenever we need corroboration—and——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Bolster up generally.

LADY ROSAMUND. Yes. Besides, everybody knows you are such an honourable man. I feel they won't suspect you.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*uncomfortable*]. Thank you! Thank you!

DOLLY [*to* LADY JESSICA]. Very well, dear. I quite understand. After George went away you were so upset at his suspicions that you came back to town without any dinner. Did I stay and have the dinner?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. No, no. I wouldn't go so far as that.

DOLLY. But what did I do? I must have dined somewhere, didn't I? Not that I mind if I didn't dine anywhere. But won't it seem funny if I didn't dine somewhere?

LADY JESSICA. I suppose it will.

DOLLY. Very well, then, where did I dine? Do tell me. I know I shall get into an awful muddle if I don't know. Where did I dine?

[*Enter* FOOTMAN.

FOOTMAN [*announcing*]. Mr George Nepean. [*Enter* GEORGE NEPEAN.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.

GEORGE [*enters very frigidly, bows very coldly. Very stiffly*]. Good morning, Lady Rosamund! [*To the others—bowing*] Good morning.

LADY ROSAMUND [*very coldly*]. My dear George, don't take that tragic tone. [*Insists on shaking hands.*] Anyone would suppose there was something dreadful the matter. I've just explained to Sir Christopher your mistake of last night.

GEORGE. My mistake?

LADY JESSICA. You shouldn't have left so hurriedly, George. I sent Mr Falkner after you to explain. Dolly, tell him.

DOLLY. Jess and I had arranged to have a little dinner all by our two selves——

GEORGE. Indeed!

DOLLY. There's nothing strange in that, Sir Christopher?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Not at all. I am sure any person of either sex would only be too delighted to dine *tête-à-tête* with you.

DOLLY. And when I got there I found poor Jess in an awful state. She said you had come into the room and had made the most horrid accusations against her, poor thing!

GEORGE. I made no accusation.

LADY JESSICA. What did you mean by saying that Gilbert must know?

GEORGE. Merely that I should tell him what I saw.

LADY JESSICA. And you have told him?

GEORGE. Yes, on his arrival an hour ago.

LADY JESSICA. Where is he?

GEORGE. Round at Sloane Street waiting till I have heard Lady Rosamund's explanation.

LADY ROSAMUND. Well, you have heard it. Or, rather, it's Dolly's

explanation. The whole thing is so ridiculously simple. I think you ought to beg Jess's pardon.

GEORGE. I will when I am sure that I have wronged her.

FREDDIE. Oh, come, I say, George! you don't refuse to take a lady's word——

LADY ROSAMUND. Freddie, subside!

DOLLY [*to* GEORGE]. Poor Jess was so much upset by what you said that she couldn't eat any dinner, she nearly had hysterics, and when she got a little better, she came straight up to town, poor thing!

GEORGE. What was Mr Falkner doing there?

LADY JESSICA. He was staying in the hotel and happened to come into the room at that moment. [*A little pause.*

LADY ROSAMUND. Is there anything else you would like to ask?

GEORGE. No.

LADY ROSAMUND. And you're quite satisfied?

GEORGE. The question is not whether I'm satisfied, but whether Gilbert will be. I'll go and fetch him. Will you excuse me?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*stops him*]. Nepean, I'm sure you don't wish to embitter your brother and Lady Jesssica's whole future life by sowing jealousy and suspicion between them. Come now, like a good fellow, you'll smooth things over as much as you can.

GEORGE. I shall not influence my brother one way or the other. He must judge for himself. [*Exit.* SIR CHRISTOPHER *shrugs his shoulders.*

DOLLY. I got through very well, didn't I? [*To* LADY JESSICA.

LADY JESSICA. Yes, dear. Thank you so much. But George didn't seem to believe it, eh?

FREDDIE. It's so jolly thin. A couple of women dining together! What should a couple of women want to dine together for? Oh, it's too thin, you know!

LADY JESSICA. And you don't think Gilbert will believe it? He must! he must! Oh, I begin to wish that we had tried——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Possibility number two. I'm afraid it's too late now.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, what shall I do? Do you think Gilbert will believe Dolly?

LADY ROSAMUND. He must, if Dolly only sticks to it.

DOLLY. Oh, I'll stick to it. Only I should like to know where I dined. Where did I dine? [*Enter* FOOTMAN *to* DOLLY.

FOOTMAN. If you please, ma'am, Mr Coke is waiting for you below.

DOLLY [*with a scream*]. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I'd quite forgotten!

LADY ROSAMUND. What?

DOLLY. I arranged to meet Archie here and take him on to the dentist's. [*To* FOOTMAN] Tell Mr Coke I'll come in a moment.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.

DOLLY [*to* LADY JESSICA]. Dear, I must go——

LADY JESSICA. You can't! You must stay now and tell Gilbert—mustn't she, Sir Christopher?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I'm afraid you must, Mrs Coke. You are our sheet-anchor.

DOLLY. But what can I tell Archie?

LADY ROSAMUND. Can't you put him off, send him away?

DOLLY. What excuse can I make? He is so fidgety and inquisitive. He'll insist on knowing everything. No, I must go.

LADY JESSICA [*desperate*]. You can't! You can't! You must stay! Couldn't we tell Archie and ask him to help us?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*impatiently to* LADY ROSAMUND]. Oh!

DOLLY. Oh, I wouldn't tell Archie for the world. He wouldn't understand.

[*Enter* ARCHIBALD COKE, *in very correct frock-coat, very prim and starchy.*

COKE. Good morning, Rosy! Freddie! Sir Christopher! [*Nodding all round*] Now, Dolly, are you ready?

DOLLY. I—I——

LADY JESSICA. She can't go, Archie.

COKE. Can't go?

LADY JESSICA. She—she isn't well.

COKE. Not well? [*Alarmed.*] Not influenza again?

DOLLY. No, not influenza. But I'd rather not go.

COKE. Oh, nonsense, nonsense! I cannot take the gas alone. [*To* SIR CHRISTOPHER] I've a terrible dread of the gas. I'm sure they'll give me too much some day. Now, Dolly.

LADY ROSAMUND [*to* SIR CHRISTOPHER]. Gilbert will be here directly. Can't you get him away?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Coke, your wife isn't just the thing, as you can see. I'll go to the dentist's with you. Come along! I'll see they give you the right dose.

COKE [*resisting*]. No. My wife is the proper person to go to the dentist with me and see that the gas is rightly administered. Come, Dolly!

LADY JESSICA [*comes desperately to* COKE]. Dolly can't go!

COKE. Why not?

LADY JESSICA. She must stay here and tell Gilbert that she dined with me last evening.

COKE. Tell Gilbert that she dined with you last evening! What for?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*aside to* LADY ROSAMUND]. We're taking too many partners into this concern.

COKE. She dined with me. Why should she tell Gilbert she dined with you?

LADY JESSICA. If you must know, I was coming to the station from Barbara's, and I must have taken the wrong turning——

COKE [*very suspicious*]. The wrong turning——

LADY JESSICA. Yes, for instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself at the Star and Garter.

COKE. The Star and Garter!

LADY JESSICA. And as I was frightfully hungry I asked Mr Falkner to give me a little dinner.

COKE. A little dinner!

LADY JESSICA. George Nepean happened to come in, and, seeing the dinner things laid, actually suspected me of dining with Mr Falkner! And he has told Gilbert, and don't you see—if Dolly will only say that it was she who was dining with me—don't you see?

COKE. No, I don't. I cannot lend myself to anything of the sort. And I expressly forbid Dolly to say that she dined with you.

LADY JESSICA. But she has said so. She has just told George Nepean.

COKE. Told George Nepean!

DOLLY. I couldn't leave poor Jess in a scrape. And now I have said so I must stick to it, mustn't I? You wouldn't have me tell another one now.

COKE. Well, I'm surprised! Really, I consider it quite disgraceful.

FREDDIE. Look here, Coke, we can't let Gilbert think that Jess was dining with Falkner, can we? He'd only make a howling scandal, and drag us all into it. We've got to say something. I know it's jolly thin, but can you think of a better one?

COKE. No, and I decline to have anything to do with this! I should have thought my character was too well known for me to be asked to a—a—— It is too disgraceful! I will not lend my countenance to anything of the kind!

LADY ROSAMUND. Very well, then, will you please take yourself off and leave us to manage the affair ourselves?

COKE. No, I will not forfeit my self-respect, I will not permit my wife to forfeit her self-respect by taking part in these proceedings. Really, it is—it is—it is too disgraceful.

[LADY JESSICA *suddenly bursts into tears, sobs violently.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*comes up to* COKE, *very calm, touches him on the shoulder*]. Coke, I assure you that theoretically I have as great an objection to lying as you or any man living. But Lady Jessica has acted a little foolishly. No more. Of that I am sure. If you consent to hold your tongue I think Gilbert Nepean will accept your wife's explanation and the affair will blow over. If, however, you insist on the truth coming out, what will happen? You will very likely bring about a rupture between them, you may possibly place Lady Jessica in a position where she will have no alternative but to take a fatal plunge, and you

will drag yourself and your wife into a very unpleasant family scandal. That's the situation.

COKE. But it places me in a very awkward position. No, really, I cannot consent—— I'm an honourable man.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. "So are we all, all honourable men." The curious thing is that ever since the days of the Garden of Eden women have had a knack of impaling us honourable men on dilemmas of this kind, where the only alternative is to be false to the truth or false to them. In this instance I think we may very well keep our mouths shut without suffering any violent pangs of conscience about the matter. Come, now!

COKE [*overwhelmed*]. Well, understand me, if I consent to keep my mouth shut, I must not be supposed to countenance what is going on. That is quite understood?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, quite! Quite! We'll consider you as strictly neutral.

COKE [*rising up, violently*]. No! On second thoughts, I really cannot. I cannot!

LADY ROSAMUND. Very well! Then will you go away and leave us to manage it as we can?

COKE. And I had arranged to take the gas so comfortably this morning. It's most unfair to place me in a position of this kind. I must protest—I really—— [*Enter* FOOTMAN.

FOOTMAN [*announcing*]. Mr Gilbert Nepean. Mr George Nepean.

COKE. Oh! [*Enter* GILBERT *and* GEORGE NEPEAN.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.

LADY ROSAMUND [*advances very cordially to* GILBERT, *who does not respond*]. Good morning, Gilbert.

GILBERT. Good morning. Good morning, Coke.

COKE [*very uncomfortable*]. Good morning.

GILBERT [*nodding*]. Freddie! Deering! [*Looks at* LADY JESSICA, *who looks at him. They do not speak. Pause, looking round.*] I thought I was coming here for a private explanation.

[SIR CHRISTOPHER *is on the point of leaving, but* LADY ROSAMUND *catches him by the coat-tails.*

LADY ROSAMUND. No, Sir Christopher. If Gilbert is determined to carry this any further we shall need the unbiased testimony of an impartial friend, so that everybody may know exactly what did occur. Please stay.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*puts down hat*]. Whew! [*To himself.*

LADY ROSAMUND. Gilbert, don't be foolish. Everybody here knows all about the stupid affair of last evening.

GILBERT. Everybody here knows? Well, I don't. I shall be glad to be informed. [*Looks round.*

[COKE *shows symptoms of great discomfort.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Nepean, I'm sure you don't wish to make any more than is necessary of Lady Jessica's trifling indiscretion——

GILBERT. I wish to make no more of it than the truth, and I'll take care that nobody makes less of it. Now—[*to* LADY JESSICA, *very furiously*]—you were dining with this fellow, Falkner, last evening?

LADY JESSICA. No.

GILBERT. No? Then whom did you dine with?

LADY JESSICA. If you speak like that I shan't answer you.

GILBERT. Will you tell me what I ask?

LADY JESSICA. No!

GILBERT. No, you won't? Perhaps, as you all know, somebody else will oblige me. Coke——

COKE [*most uncomfortable*]. Really, I—I don't know all the particulars, and I would prefer not to be mixed up in your private affairs.

GILBERT. Deering—you?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. My dear fellow, I only know what I've heard, and hearsay evidence is proverbially untrustworthy. Now, if I may offer you a little advice, if I were you I should gently take Lady Jessica by the hand, I should gently lead her home, I should gently use all those endearing little arts of persuasion and entreaty which a husband may legitimately use to his wife, and I should gently beguile her into telling me the whole truth. I should believe everything she told me, I shouldn't listen to what anybody else said, and I should never mention the matter again. Now, do as I tell you, and you'll be a happy man to-morrow, and for the rest of your life. [*Pause.*

GILBERT [*looks at* LADY JESSICA]. No. [SIR CHRISTOPHER *shrugs his shoulders.*] I came here for an explanation, and I won't go till I've got it.

LADY ROSAMUND. My dear Gilbert, we're patiently waiting to give you an explanation, if you'll only listen to it. Dolly, do tell him how it all happened, and let him see what a donkey he is making of himself.

DOLLY. Yes, Gilbert, I wish you wouldn't get in these awful tempers. You frighten us so that in a very little while we shan't know whether we're speaking the truth, or whether we're not.

GILBERT. Go on!

DOLLY. Jess and I had arranged to have a little *tête-à-tête* dinner at Shepperford and talk over old times, all by our two selves [COKE *gets very uncomfortable*]—hadn't we, Jess? Rosy, you heard us arranging it all?

LADY ROSAMUND. Yes, on the last night you were at our place.

DOLLY. Yes. Well, Jess got there first and then Mr Falkner happened to come into the room, and then George happened to come in and wouldn't wait to listen to Jess's explanation, would he, Jess? Well, when I got there I found Jess in strong hysterics, poor old dear! I

couldn't get her round for ever so long. And as soon as she was better she came straight up to town. And that's all. [*Pause.*

GILBERT. And what did you do?

DOLLY [*very nervous*]. I came up to town too.

GILBERT. Without any dinner?

DOLLY. No—I——

GILBERT. Where did you dine?

DOLLY. I didn't really dine anywhere—not to say dine. I had some cold chicken and a little tongue when I got home. [*Pause.*] And a tomato salad.

COKE [*very much shocked at* DOLLY]. Oh, of all the——

[SIR CHRISTOPHER *nudges him to be quiet.*

GILBERT. Coke, what do you know of this?

COKE. Well—I know what Dolly has just told you.

GILBERT. You allow your wife to dine out alone?

COKE. Yes—yes—on certain occasions.

GILBERT. And you knew of this arrangement?

COKE. Yes—at least, no—not before she told me of it. But after she told me I did know.

GEORGE. But Jessica said that she expected a small party.

DOLLY. I was the small party.

GILBERT [*to* COKE]. What time did Dolly get home last evening?

COKE. Eh? Well, about——

DOLLY. A little before nine.

GEORGE. Impossible! I was at Shepperford after half-past seven. If Lady Jessica had hysterics, and you stayed with her, you could scarcely have reached Kensington before nine.

DOLLY. Well, perhaps it was ten. Yes, it was ten.

GILBERT. Coke, were you at home last evening when your wife got back?

COKE. I? No—yes, yes—no—not precisely.

GILBERT [*growing indignant*]. Surely you must know whether you were at home or not when your wife returned?

COKE. No, I don't. And I very much object to be cross-questioned in this manner. I've told you all I know, and—I—I withdraw from the whole business. Now, Dolly, are you ready?

GILBERT. No, stop! I want to get at the bottom of this and I will. [*Coming furiously to* LADY JESSICA] Once more, will you give me your version of this cock-and-bull story? [*Enter* FOOTMAN.

FOOTMAN [*announcing*]. Mr Falkner!

GILBERT. Ah!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Nepean! Nepean! Control yourself!

[*Enter* FALKNER.

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.

GILBERT. Let me be, Deering. [*Going to* FALKNER] You were at Shepperford last evening. My wife was there with you?

FALKNER. I was at Shepperford last evening. Lady Jessica was there. She was dining with Lady Rosamund——

LADY ROSAMUND. No! No!

GILBERT. Lady Jessica was dining with Lady Rosamund?

FALKNER. I understood her to say so, did I not, Lady Rosamund?

LADY ROSAMUND. No! No! It was Mrs Coke who was dining with Lady Jessica.

FALKNER. Then I misunderstood you. Does it matter?

GILBERT. Yes. I want to know what the devil you were doing there?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Nepean! Nepean!

GILBERT. Do you hear? What the devil were you doing there? Will you tell me, or——

[*Trying to get at* FALKNER, SIR CHRISTOPHER *holds him back.*

LADY JESSICA [*rises very quietly*]. Mr Falkner, tell my husband the truth.

FALKNER. But, Lady Jessica——

LADY JESSICA. Yes, if you please—the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Tell him all. I wish it.

GILBERT. You hear what she says. Now, then, the truth—and be damned to you!

FALKNER [*looks around, then after a pause, with great triumph*]. I love Lady Jessica with all my heart and soul! I asked her to come to me at Shepperford last evening. She came. Your brother saw us and left us. The next moment Lady Rosamund came, and she had scarcely gone when the maid came with your telegram and took Lady Jessica back to town. If you think there was anything more on your wife's side than a passing folly and amusement at my expense, you will wrong her. If you think there is anything less on my side than the deepest, deepest, deepest love and worship, you will wrong me. Understand this. She is guiltless. Be sure of that. And now you've got the truth, and be damned to *you*. [*Goes to door at back—turns*] If you want me, you know where to find me. [*To* LADY JESSICA] Lady Jessica, I am at your service—always! [*Exit at back. They all look at each other.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*very softly to himself*]. Possibility number two—with a vengeance!

# ACT IV

SCENE: *Drawing-room in* SIR CHRISTOPHER'S *flat in Victoria Street. Left, at back, a large recess, taking up half the stage. The right half is taken up by an inner room furnished as library and smoking-room. Curtains dividing library from drawing-room. Door up stage, left. A table down stage, right. The room is in great confusion, with portmanteau open, clothes, etc., scattered over the floor; articles which an officer going to Central Africa might want are lying about.*

TIME: *Night, about half-past nine o'clock.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER *and* TAPLIN *are busy packing. Ring at door.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. See who it is, Taplin; and come back and finish packing the moment I am disengaged.

[*Exit* TAPLIN. *He re-enters in a few moments, showing in* BEATRICE *in evening dress.* SIR CHRISTOPHER *goes to her, and shakes hands cordially.*

[*Exit* TAPLIN.

BEATRICE. I was out dining when you called. But I got your message, and I came on at once.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I couldn't wait. I had to come back and pack. [*Going on with his packing*] I haven't one half-moment to spare.

BEATRICE. When do you start?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. To-morrow morning. It's very urgent. I've been at the War Office all the afternoon. You'll excuse my going on with this. I've three most important duties to fulfil to-night.

BEATRICE. What are they?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*packing*]. I've got to pack. I've got to persuade Ned to come out there with me—if I can. And I've got [*looking straight at her*] to make you promise to be my wife when I come home again.

BEATRICE. Oh, Kit, you know what I've told you so often!

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*packing always*]. Yes, and you're telling it me again, and wasting my time when every moment is gold. Ah, dear, forgive me, you know I think you're worth the wooing. And you know I'm the man to woo you. And you know I'm ready to spend three, five, seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years in winning you. But if you'd only say "Yes" this minute, and let me pack and see Ned, you'd save me such a lot of trouble. And I'll do all the love-making when I come back.

BEATRICE. Where is Ned?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Playing the fool for Lady Jessica. There never was but one woman in this world that was worth playing the fool for, and I'm playing the fool for her. I've sent for Ned to come here. That's a digression. Come back to brass tacks. You'll be my wife when I come home?

BEATRICE. Let me think it over, Kit.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. No. You've had plenty of time for that. I can't allow you to think it over any longer.

BEATRICE. But it means so much to me. Let me write to you out there.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*very determinedly*]. No. [*Leaves his packing, takes out his watch.*] It's a little too bad of you when I'm so pressed. Now, I can only give you five minutes, and it must absolutely be fixed up in that time. [*With great tenderness and passion*] Come, my dear, dear chum, what makes you hesitate to give yourself to me? You want me to come well out of this, don't you?

BEATRICE. You know I do!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Then you don't love your country if you won't have me. Once give me your promise, and it will give me the pluck of fifty men! Don't you know if I'm sure of you I shall carry everything before me?

BEATRICE. Will you? Will you? But if you were to die——

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I won't die if you're waiting to be my wife when I come home. And you will? You will? I won't hear anything but "Yes." You shan't move one inch till you've said "Yes." Now! say it! Say "Yes!" Say "Yes"—do you hear?

BEATRICE [*throwing herself into his arms*]. Yes! Yes! Yes! Take me! Take me!

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*kissing her very reverently*]. My wife when I come home again. [*A pause.*

BEATRICE. You know, Kit, I can love very deeply.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. And so you shall, when I come home again. And so will I when I come home again. [*Looking at his watch*] A minute and a quarter! I must get on with my packing.

BEATRICE. Kit, there will be some nursing and other woman's work out there?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Yes, I suppose——

BEATRICE. I'll come with you.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Very well. How long will it take you to pack?

BEATRICE. Half an hour.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. All right! I must wait here for Ned. Come back and have some supper by and by.

BEATRICE. Yes—in half an hour.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. We might be married at Cairo—on our way out?

BEATRICE. Just as you please.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Or before we start to-morrow morning?

BEATRICE. Will there be time?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, I'll make time. [*Enter* TAPLIN.

TAPLIN. Mr Gilbert Neapean is below, Sir Christopher.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*glancing at his packing*]. Show him up, Taplin. [*Exit* TAPLIN.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*holding* BEATRICE's *hand*]. To-morrow morning, then?

BEATRICE. Yes, I've given you some trouble to win me, Kit?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. No more than you're worth.

BEATRICE. I'll give you none now you have won me.

[*Enter* TAPLIN.

TAPLIN [*announcing*]. Mr Gilbert Nepean. [*Enter* GILBERT NEPEAN.

[*Exit* TAPLIN.

BEATRICE. How d'ye do?

GILBERT. How d'ye do? [*Shaking hands.*

BEATRICE. And good-bye. [*To* SIR CHRISTOPHER] No, I won't have you come down all those stairs, indeed I won't. *Au revoir.* [*Exit.*

GILBERT. Excuse my coming at this hour.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I'm rather pressed. What can I do for you?

GILBERT. I have been down to Shepperford this afternoon. It seems you dined there last evening.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I did.

GILBERT. I want to get all the evidence.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. What for?

GILBERT. To guide me in my future action. Deering, I trust you. Can I take that fellow's word that my wife is guiltless?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I'm sure you can.

GILBERT. How do you know?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Because he'd give his head to tell you that she is not.

GILBERT. Why?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. It would give him the chance he is waiting for—to take her off your hands.

GILBERT. Take her off my hands—he's waiting for that?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Don't you see he is? And don't you see that you're doing your best to make him successful?

GILBERT. How?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Don't think when you've married a woman that you can sit down and neglect her. You can't. You've married one of the most charming women in London, and when a man has married a charming woman, if he doesn't continue to make love to her some other man will. Such are the sad ways of humankind! How have you treated Lady Jessica?

GILBERT. But do you suppose I will allow my wife to go out dining with other men?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. The best way to avoid that is to take her out to dinner yourself—and to give her a good one. Have you dined to-night?

GILBERT. Dined? No! I can't dine till I know what to believe.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. The question is, what do you want to believe? If you want to believe her innocent, take the facts as they stand. If you want to believe her guilty, continue to treat her as you are doing, and you'll very soon have plenty of proof. And let me tell you, nobody will pity you. Do you want to believe her innocent?

GILBERT. Of course I do.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Where is she?

GILBERT. I don't know—at home, I suppose.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Go home to her—don't say one word about what has happened, and invite her out to the very best dinner that London can provide.

GILBERT. But after she has acted as she has done?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. My dear fellow, she's only a woman. I never met but one woman that was worth taking seriously. What are they? A kind of children, you know. Humour them, play with them, buy them the toys they cry for, but don't get angry with them. They're not worth it, except one! Now, I must get on with my packing.

[SIR CHRISTOPHER *sets to work packing.* GILBERT *walks up and down the room, biting his nails, deliberating.* GILBERT, *after a moment or two, speaks.*

GILBERT. Perhaps you're right, Deering.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, I know I am!

GILBERT. I'll go to her.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*busy packing*]. Make haste, or you may be too late.

[GILBERT *goes to door.* *At that moment enter* TAPLIN.

TAPLIN [*announcing*]. Mr Falkner! [*Enter* FALKNER.

[*Exit* TAPLIN. GILBERT *and* FALKNER *stand for a moment looking at each other.* *Exit* GILBERT; FALKNER *looks after him.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Well?

FALKNER [*very elated*]. You want to see me?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Yes. You seem excited.

FALKNER. I've had good news.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. What?

FALKNER. The best. She loves me.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You've seen her?

FALKNER. No.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Written to her?

FALKNER. Yes. I've just had this answer. [*Taking out letter.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Where is she?

FALKNER. Still at her sister's. [*Reading*] "I shall never forget the words you spoke this morning. You were right in saying that your love would not be wasted. I have learned at last what it is worth. You said you would be at my service always. Do not write again. Wait till you hear from me, and the moment I send for you, come to me." I knew I should win her at last, and I shall!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. *Après?*

FALKNER. What does it matter? If I can persuade her I shall take her out to Africa with me.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Africa? Nonsense! There's only one woman in the world that's any use in that part of the globe, and I'm taking her out myself.

FALKNER. Beatrice?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. We are to be married to-morrow morning.

FALKNER. I congratulate you—with all my heart.

[*Shaking hands warmly.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Thank you. [*Pause.*] You'll come with us, Ned?

FALKNER. If she will come too.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Oh, we can't have her.

FALKNER. Why not?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. In the first place, she'd be very much in the way. In the second place—it's best to be frank—Lady Deering will not recognize Lady Jessica.

FALKNER. Very well. [*Turns on heel.*] Good night, Kit!

[*Very curtly.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. No. Ned, you're still up that everlasting *cul-de-sac*—playing the lover to a married woman, and I've got to drag you out of it.

FALKNER. It's no use, Kit. My mind is made up. Let me go.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. To the devil with Lady Jessica? No, I'm going to stop you.

FALKNER. Ah, you'll stop me! How?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. There was a time when one whisper would have done it [*Whispers.*] Duty. You know that you're the only man who can treat peaceably with the chiefs. You know that your going out may save hundreds, perhaps thousands, of lives.

FALKNER. I'm not sure of that.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You're not sure? Well, then, try it—put it to the test. But you know there's every chance. You know the whole country is waiting for you to declare yourself. You know that you have a splendid chance of putting the crown on your life's work, and you know that if you don't seize it it will be because you stay here skulking after her!

FALKNER. Skulking!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. What do you call it? What will everybody call it? Ned, you've faced the most horrible death day after day for months. You've done some of the bravest things out there that have been done by any Englishman in this generation; but if you turn tail now there's only one word will fit you to the end of your days, and that word is 'Coward'!

FALKNER. Coward!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Coward! And there's only one epitaph to be written on you by and by—"Sold his honour, his fame, his country, his duty, his conscience, his all, for a petticoat!"

FALKNER. Very well, then, when I die write that over me. I tell you this, Kit, if I can only win her—and I shall, I shall, I feel it—she'll leave that man and come to me; and then!—I don't care one snap of the fingers if Africa is swept bare of humanity from Cairo to Cape Town, and from Teneriffe to Zanzibar! Now argue with me after that!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Argue with you? Not I! But I wish there was some way of kidnapping fools into sense and reason and locking them up there for the rest of their lives. [*Enter* TAPLIN.

TAPLIN [*announcing*]. Lady Jessica Nepean, Lady Rosamund Tatton.

[*Enter* LADY JESSICA *and* LADY ROSAMUND.

[*Exit* TAPLIN.

[LADY JESSICA *shows delighted surprise at seeing* FALKNER, *goes to him cordially.* LADY ROSAMUND *tries to stop* LADY JESSICA *from going to* FALKNER.

LADY JESSICA [*to* FALKNER]. I didn't expect to find you here.

FALKNER. I am waiting for you.

LADY ROSAMUND [*interposing*]. No, Jess, no. Sir Christopher! [*Aside to him*] Help me to get her away from him.

[LADY JESSICA *and* FALKNER *are talking vigorously together.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. One moment. Perhaps we may as well get this little matter fixed up here and now. [*Takes out watch, looking ruefully at his packing.*] Lady Jessica, may I ask what has happened since I left you this morning?

LADY JESSICA. Nothing. My husband went away in a rage. I've stayed with Rosy all day.

LADY ROSAMUND. We've been talking it all over.

LADY JESSICA. Oh, we've been talking it all over—[*gesture*]—and over and over, till I'm thoroughly—*seasick* of it!

LADY ROSAMUND. And so I persuaded her to come and talk it over with you.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*glancing at his packing, to* LADY JESSICA]. You can't arrive at a decision?

LADY JESSICA. Oh, yes, I can; only Rosy won't let me act on it.

LADY ROSAMUND. I should think not.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. What is your decision?

LADY JESSICA. I don't mind for myself. I feel that everything is in a glorious muddle, and I don't care how I get out of it, or whether I get out of it at all.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. But on the whole the best way of getting out of it is to run away with Mr Falkner?

LADY JESSICA. Mr Falkner has behaved splendidly to me.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. He has! He's a brick! And I'm quite sure that in proposing to ruin your reputation, and make you miserable for life, he is actuated by the very best intentions.

LADY JESSICA. I don't care whether I'm happy or miserable for the rest of my life.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You don't care now, but you will to-morrow and next week, and next year, and all the years after.

LADY JESSICA. No, I shan't! I won't!

FALKNER. I'll take care, Lady Jessica, that you never regret this step. Your mind is quite made up?

LADY JESSICA. Yes, quite.

FALKNER. Then no more need be said.

[*Offering arm. Gesture of despair from* LADY ROSAMUND. SIR CHRISTOPHER *soothes her.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. One moment, Ned! [*Takes out his watch, looks ruefully at his packing, half aside.*] Good Lord! when shall I get on with my packing? [*Puts watch in pocket, faces* FALKNER *and* LADY JESSICA *very resolutely.*] Now! I've nothing to say in the abstract against running away with another man's wife! There may be planets where it is not only the highest ideal morality, but where it has the further advantage of being a practical way of carrying on society. But it has this one fatal defect in our country—it won't work! You know what we English are, Ned. We're not a bit better than our neighbours, but, thank God! we do pretend we are, and we do make it hot for anybody who disturbs that holy pretence. And take my word for it, my dear Lady Jessica, my dear Ned, it won't work. You know it's not an original experiment you're making. It has been tried before. Have you ever known it to be successful? Lady Jessica, think of the brave pioneers who have gone before you in this enterprise. They've all perished, and their bones whiten the anti-matrimonial shore. Think of them! Charley Gray and Lady Rideout—flitting shabbily about the Continent at cheap *table d'hôtes* and gambling-clubs, rubbing shoulders with all the blackguards and *demi-mondaines* of Europe. Poor old Fitz and his beauty—moping down at Farnhurst, cut by the county, with no single occupation except to nag and rag each other to pieces from morning to night. Billy Dover and Polly Atchison——

LADY JESSICA [*indignant*]. Well!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. —cut in for fresh partners in three weeks. That old idiot, Sir Bonham Dancer—paid five thousand pounds damages for being saddled with the professional strong man's wife. George Nuneham and Mrs Sandys—George is conducting a tramcar in New York, and Mrs Sandys—Lady Jessica, you knew Mrs Sandys, a delicate, sweet little creature, I've met her at your house—she drank herself to death, and died in a hospital. Not encouraging, is it? Marriage may be disagreeable, it may be unprofitable, it may be ridiculous; but it isn't as bad as that! And do you think the experiment is going to be successful in *your case*? Not a bit of it! No. Ned, hear me out. [*Turns to* LADY JESSICA.] First of all there will be the shabby scandal and dirty business of the divorce court. You won't like that. It isn't nice! You won't like it. After the divorce court, what is Ned to do with you? Take you to Africa? I do implore you, if you hope for any happiness in that state to which it is pleasing Falkner and Providence to call you, I do implore you, don't go out to Africa with him. You'd never stand the climate and the hardships, and you'd bore each other to death in a week. But if you don't go out to Africa, what are you to do? Stay in England, in society? Everybody will cut you. Take a place in the country? Think of poor old Fitz down at Farnhurst! Go abroad? Think of Charley Gray and Lady Rideout. Take any of the other dozen alternatives and find yourself stranded in some shady hole or corner, with the one solitary hope and ambition of somehow wriggling back into respectability. That's your side of it, Lady Jessica. As for Ned here, what is to become of him? [*Angry gesture from* FALKNER.] Yes, Ned, I know you don't want to hear, but I'm going to finish. Turn away your head. This is for Lady Jessica. He's at the height of his career, with a great and honourable task in front of him. If you turn him aside you'll not only wreck and ruin your own life and reputation, but you'll wreck and ruin his. You won't! You won't! His interests, his duty, his honour, all lie out there. If you care for him, don't keep him shuffling and malingering here. Send him out with me to finish his work like the good, splendid fellow he is. Set him free, Lady Jessica, and go back to your home. Your husband has been here. He's sorry for what is past, and he has promised to treat you more kindly in the future. He's waiting at home to take you out. You missed a very good dinner last night. Don't miss another to-night. I never saw a man in a better temper than your husband. Go to him, and do, once for all, have done with this other folly. Do believe me, my dear Ned, my dear Lady Jessica, before it is too late, do believe me, it won't work, it won't work, it won't work! [*A little pause.*

LADY JESSICA. I think you're the most horrid man I ever met!

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Because I've told you the truth.

LADY JESSICA. Yes, that's the worst of it! It is the truth.

LADY ROSAMUND. It's exactly what I've been telling her all the afternoon.

FALKNER. Lady Jessica, I want to speak to you alone.

LADY JESSICA. What's the use? We've got to part.

FALKNER. No! No!

LADY JESSICA. Yes, my friend. I won't ruin your career. We've got to part; and the fewer words the better.

FALKNER. I can't give you up.

LADY JESSICA. You must! Perhaps it's best. You can always cherish your fancy portrait of me, and you'll never find out how very unlike me it is. And I shall read about you in the newspapers and be very proud —and—come along, Rosy! [*Going off.* FALKNER *is going after her.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*stopping him*]. It can answer no purpose, Ned.

FALKNER. What the devil has it got to do with you? You've taken her from me. Leave her to me for a few minutes. Lady Jessica, I claim to speak to you alone.

LADY JESSICA. It can only be to say "Good-bye."

FALKNER. I'll never say it.

LADY JESSICA. Then I must. Good-bye!

FALKNER. No—say it to me alone.

LADY JESSICA. It can only be that—no more——

FALKNER. Say it to me alone. [*Pointing to curtains.*

LADY JESSICA. Rosy, wait for me. I won't be a minute.

[*Going to* FALKNER. LADY ROSAMUND *makes a little movement to stop her.* SIR CHRISTOPHER *by a gesture silences* LADY ROSAMUND *and allows* LADY JESSICA *to pass through the curtains where* FALKNER *has preceded her.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*to* LADY JESSICA]. Remember his future is at stake as well as yours. Only the one word.

LADY JESSICA [*as she passes through curtains*]. Only the one word.

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*to* LADY ROSAMUND]. You'll excuse my packing. I've not a moment to waste. [*Enter* TAPLIN.

TAPLIN. Mr Gilbert Nepean, Sir Christopher; he says he must see you.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. You didn't say Lady Jessica was here?

TAPLIN. No, Sir Christopher.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. I'll come to him.

[*Exit* TAPLIN. LADY ROSAMUND *passes between the curtains* SIR CHRISTOPHER *is going to door, meets* GILBERT NEPEAN *who enters very excitedly.*

GILBERT [*off left*]. Deering! Deering, she's not at home! She's not at her sister's. You don't think she has gone to that fellow?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Make yourself easy. She is coming back to you.

GILBERT. Where is she?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Will you let me take a message to her? May I tell her that for the future you will treat her with every kindness and consideration?

GILBERT. Yes—yes. Say—oh—tell her what you please. Say I know I've behaved like a bear. Tell her I'm sorry, and if she'll come home I'll do my best to make her happy in future.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. And [*taking out watch*] it's rather too late for dinner, may I suggest an invitation to supper?

GILBERT. Yes—yes.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Lady Rosamund—— [*Calls.*

[LADY ROSAMUND *enters.*

GILBERT. You——

[*Going towards curtains.* SIR CHRISTOPHER *intercepts him.*

LADY ROSAMUND. We stepped over to ask Sir Christopher's advice.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. And, strange to say, they've taken it.

GILBERT [*trying to get to curtains*]. Where is Jessica?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*stopping him*]. No. I'm to take the message. Lady Jessica, your husband is waiting to take you to supper. You've only just time to go home and dress.

[LADY JESSICA *draws curtains aside, turns, and throws a last agonized adieu to* FALKNER, *who stands speechless and helpless.* LADY JESSICA *then controls her features and comes out to* GILBERT. *The curtains close.*

GILBERT. Will you come home and dress and go to the Savoy to supper? [*Offering arm.*

LADY JESSICA. Delighted. [*Taking his arm.*

GILBERT. And you, Rosy?

LADY ROSAMUND. I can't. [*Looking at watch*] It's nearly ten o'clock! Good night, Sir Christopher. [*Kissing* LADY JESSICA] Good night, dearest. Good night, Gilbert. Take care of her, or you'll lose her. Excuse my running away, I must get back to my poor old Freddie.

[*Exit* LADY ROSAMUND. FALKNER'S *face appears through the curtains.* LADY JESSICA *sees it.*

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Good night, Lady Jessica, and good-bye!

LADY JESSICA. Good night, Sir Christopher, and—[*at* FALKNER] one last "Good-bye."

[*She looks towards curtains as if about to break away from* GILBERT *and go to* FALKNER.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Good night, Nepean!

GILBERT. Good night, Deering.

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Try and keep her. She's worth the keeping.

GILBERT. I'll try.

[*Exeunt* LADY JESSICA *and* GILBERT. SIR CHRISTOPHER *goes*

*towards door with them;* FALKNER *comes forward in great despair from curtains, throws himself into chair against table, buries his face in his hands*

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*goes to him very affectionately*]. Come! Come! My dear old Ned! This will never do! And all for a woman! They're not worth it. [*Aside, softly*] Except one! They're not worth it. Come, buckle on your courage! There's work in front of you, and fame, and honour! And I must take you out and bring you back with flying colours! Come! Come! My dear old fellow!

FALKNER. Let me be for a minute, Kit. Let me be!

[*Enter* BEATRICE. SIR CHRISTOPHER *goes to her.*

BEATRICE. What's the matter?

SIR CHRISTOPHER. Hush! Poor old chap! He's hard hit! Everybody else seems to be making a great mess of their love affairs. We won't make a mess of ours?

BEATRICE. No. You'll get over this, Ned? We'll help you. You'll get over it?

FALKNER [*rising with great determination*]. Yes, I shall pull round. I'll try! I'll try! To-morrow, Kit? We start to-morrow?

SIR CHRISTOPHER [*putting one arm round each affectionately*]. To-morrow! My wife! My friend! My two comrades!

# PYGMALION AND GALATEA

## A MYTHOLOGICAL COMEDY

### By SIR WILLIAM S. GILBERT

*First produced at the Haymarket Theatre, London, December 9, 1871*

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Pygmalion, *an Athenian sculptor*
Leucippus, *a soldier*
Chrysos, *an art patron*
Agesimos, *Chrysos' slave*
Mimos, *Pygmalion's slave*
Galatea, *an animated statue*
Cynisca, *Pygmalion's wife*
Daphne, *Chrysos' wife*
Myrine, *Pygmalion's sister*

Scene: *Pygmalion's studio*

*The action is comprised within the space of twenty-four hours.*

EXAMPLES like the Russian ballet and the Gilbert and Sullivan operas prove at once how evidently the art of the theatre is a composite; but this book confines itself to what is called, rather quaintly, 'legitimate' drama—as if by joining music with words the resulting opera was bastard!

Gilbert's *libretti* and Sullivan's music are parts of a united whole, and to hear the music without the words, or to read the words without the music, is to do injustice to both collaborators. But Gilbert, like Sullivan, had an independent existence, and *The Palace of Truth* and *Pygmalion and Galatea* may be cited as characteristically whimsical works of the great humorist with a style so personal that the word 'Gilbertian' belongs to the language.

Gilbert was more than an entertainer, however. Like Lewis Carroll and Francis Burnand, he enjoyed juggling with words and concocting anomalous situations, but there was irony in his quibbles and satire in

his anomalies. He satirized classical legend in *Pygmalion and Galatea*, as he satirized the æsthetes in *Patience*; and he laughed at Tennyson's beautifully earnest *The Princess* in his *Princess Ida*. One of the great functions of comedy is to make war upon the seven deadly virtues. Gilbert attacked solemnity, romanticism, and artificiality, and in a sense he prepared the way for the revolt, headed by Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, against unreality and the sort of sentimentalism which still survives in much musical comedy.

# ACT I

SCENE: PYGMALION'S *studio. Several classical studies are placed about the room, including a life-sized Venus; at the back a temple or cabinet containing a statue of* GALATEA, *before which curtains are drawn concealing the statue from the audience. The curtains must be so contrived that they will open readily and display the statue completely, without much effort on the part of the actor who opens them. They must also be fitted with mechanical appliances to close apparently of their own accord at the latter part of Act III; several doors.*

MIMOS, *a slave, is discovered at work on a half-finished statue. To him enter* AGESIMOS *from right; he is magnificently dressed.*

AGESIMOS [*haughtily*]. Good day. Is this Pygmalion's studio?
MIMOS [*bowing*]. It is.
AGESIMOS. Are you Pygmalion?
MIMOS. Oh, no;
I am his slave.
AGESIMOS. And has Pygmalion slaves!
A stone-cutter with slaves to wait on him;
With slaves to fetch and carry—come and go—
And bend submissive uncomplaining backs
To whips and scourges at a sculptor's whim!
What's the world coming to?
MIMOS. What is your will?
AGESIMOS. This. Chrysos will receive Pygmalion
At half-past three to-day; let him attend.
MIMOS. And are you Chrysos, sir?
AGESIMOS [*disconcerted*]. Well, no, I'm not.
That is, not altogether. I'm, in fact,
His slave.
MIMOS [*relieved*]. His slave!
AGESIMOS [*very proudly*]. My name's Agesimos!
MIMOS [*laughing*]. And has Agesimos a master, then;
To bid him fetch and carry—come and go—
And does he bend an uncomplaining back
To whips and scourges at that master's whim?
What's the world coming to? [*Laughing heartily.*
AGESIMOS. Poor purblind fool!

The acting rights of this play are reserved. Applications regarding amateur performances should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

I'd sooner tie the sandals of my lord
Than own a dozen bondsmen such as you!
As for the scourge—to be by Chrysos flogged
Is honour in itself. I'd rather far
Be flogged by Chrysos seven times a day
Than flog you hence to the Acropolis!
What say you now?

MIMOS [*laughing*]. Why, that upon one point
Agesimos and I are quite agreed.
And who is Chrysos?

AGESIMOS [*sitting*]. Hear the slave, ye gods!
He knows not Chrysos.

MIMOS. Verily, not I.

AGESIMOS. He is the chiefest man in Athens, sir;
The father of the arts—a nobleman
Of princely liberality and taste,
On whom five hundred starved Pygmalions
May batten if they will. [*Enter* PYGMALION *from left.*

PYGMALION. Who is this man?

AGESIMOS [*still seated*]. I'm Chrysos' slave—[*proudly*] my name's Agesimos.
Chrysos has heard of you: he understands
That you have talent, and he condescends
To bid you call on him. But take good care
How you offend him: he can make or mar.

PYGMALION. Your master's slave reflects his insolence.
[AGESIMOS *rises.*
Tell him from me that, though I'm poor enough,
I am an artist and a gentleman.
He should not reckon art among his slaves:
She rules the world—so let him wait on her.

AGESIMOS. This is a sculptor!

PYGMALION [*furiously*]. And an angry one!
[AGESIMOS *retreats.*
Begone, and take my message to your lord.
[*Exit* AGESIMOS *to right.*
[MIMOS *works at statuette until his exit.*
Insolent hound! [*Enter* CYNISCA *from left.*

CYNISCA. Pygmalion, what's amiss?

PYGMALION. Chrysos has sent his slave to render me
The customary tribute paid by wealth
To mere intelligence.

CYNISCA. Pygmalion!
Brooding upon the chartered insolence

Of a mere slave! Dismiss the thought at once.
Come, take thy chisel—thou hast work to do
Ere thy wife-model takes her leave to-day;
In half an hour I must be on the road
To Athens. Half an hour remains to thee—
Come—make the most of it—I'll pose myself;
Say—will that do?

PYGMALION. I cannot work to-day.
My hand's uncertain—I must rest awhile. [*Sits.*

CYNISCA. Then rest and gaze upon thy masterpiece,
'Twill reconcile thee to thyself—Behold!
[*Draws curtain and discovers statue of* GALATEA.

PYGMALION. Yes—for in gazing on my handiwork
I gaze on heaven's handiwork—thyself——

CYNISCA. And yet, although it be thy masterpiece,
It has the fault thy patrons find with all
Thy many statues.

PYGMALION. What then do they say?

CYNISCA. They say Pygmalion's statues have one head—
[*Coming down centre.*
That head, Cynisca's.

PYGMALION. So, then, it's a fault [*Rises.*
To reproduce maybe an hundredfold,
For the advantage of mankind at large,
The happiness the gods have given me! [*Takes her hand.*
Well, when I find a fairer head than thine
I'll give my patrons some variety.

CYNISCA [*hastily*]. I would not have thee find another head
That seemed as fair to thee for all the world!
We'll have no stranger models if you please;
I'll be your model, sir, as heretofore,
So reproduce me at your will; and yet
[*Going right of statue.*
It were sheer vanity in me to think
That this fair stone recalls Cynisca's face!

PYGMALION [*still seated*]. Cynisca's face in every line!

CYNISCA. No, no!
Those outlines softened, angles smoothed away,
The eyebrows arched, the head more truly poised,
The forehead ten years smoother than my own,
Tell rather of Cynisca as she was
When, in the silent groves of Artemis,
Pygmalion told his love ten years ago;
And then the placid brow, the sweet sad lips,

The gentle head down-bent resignedly,
Proclaim that this is not Pygmalion's wife,
Who laughs and frowns, but knows no meed between!
I am no longer as that statue is! [*Closes curtains.*

PYGMALION. Why, here's ingratitude, to slander Time,
Who in his hurried course has passed thee by!
Or is it that Cynisca won't allow
That Time *could* pass her by, and never pause
To print a kiss upon so fair a face? [CYNISCA *sits.*

[*Enter* MYRINE *from right, running.*

MYRINE. Pygmalion, I have news.

PYGMALION. My sister, speak.

MYRINE [*bashfully*]. Send Mimos hence.

PYGMALION [*signs to* MIMOS, *who exits to left*]. Now we are quite alone.

MYRINE. Leucippus——

CYNISCA. Well?

MYRINE [*to* PYGMALION]. He was thy schoolfellow,
And thou and he are brothers save in blood;
He loves my brother as a brother.

PYGMALION. Yes,
I'm sure of that; but is that all thy news?
There's more to come!

MYRINE [*bashfully*]. He loves thy sister too.

PYGMALION. Why, these are goodly tidings! kiss me, girl.

[*Kisses her.*

[*She kneels right of* CYNISCA, *who kisses her.*

I'm more than happy at thy happiness,
There is no better fellow in the world.

CYNISCA. But tell us all about it, dear. How came
The awkward, bashful, burly warrior,
To nerve himself to this confession?

[LEUCIPPUS *appears at door, right.*

MYRINE. Why—
He's here—[*goes to him and brings him down*]—and he shall tell thee how it was.

LEUCIPPUS [*awkwardly*]. In truth I hardly know, I'm new at it;
I'm but a soldier. Could I fight my way
Into a maiden's heart, why, well and good;
I'd get there—somehow. But to talk and sigh,
And whisper pretty things, I can't do that;
I tried it, but I stammered, blushed, and failed.
Myrine laughed at me—but, bless her heart,
She knew my meaning, and she pulled me through!

MYRINE. I don't know how, Pygmalion, but I did.
He stammered, as he tells you, and I laughed;
And then I felt so sorry, when I saw
The great, big, brave Leucippus look so like
A beaten schoolboy—that I think I cried.
And then—I quite forget what happened next.
Till, by some means, we, who had always been
So cold and formal, distant and polite,
Found ourselves——
LEUCIPPUS. Each upon the other's neck!
[*Embracing her.*
You are not angry? [*Offering his hand.*
PYGMALION [*taking it*]. Angry? overjoyed!
I wish I had been there, unseen, to see:
No sight could give me greater happiness!
LEUCIPPUS. What! say you so? Why, then, Myrine, girl,
We'll reproduce it for his benefit. [*They embrace.*
See here, Pygmalion, here's a group for thee!
Come, fetch thy clay, and set to work on it,
I'll promise thee thy models will not tire.
CYNISCA. How now, Leucippus, where's the schoolboy blush
That used to coat thy face at sight of her?
LEUCIPPUS. The coating was but thin, we've rubbed it off!
[*Kisses* MYRINE *and takes her to seat, right*
PYGMALION [*goes to statuette and works at it*]. Take care of him, Myrine; thou hast not
The safeguard that protects *her*.
[*Indicating* CYNISCA, *who is seated left.*
MYRINE [*sits right*, LEUCIPPUS *behind her*]. What is that?
CYNISCA. It's a strange story. Many years ago
I was a holy nymph of Artemis,
Pledged to eternal maidenhood.
LEUCIPPUS. Indeed!
MYRINE. How terrible!
CYNISCA. It seems not so to me;
For weeks and weeks I pondered stedfastly
Upon the nature of that serious step
Before I took it—lay awake at night,
Looking upon it from this point and that,
And I at length determined that the vow
Which to Myrine seems so terrible
Was one that I, at all events, could keep.
[LEUCIPPUS *whispers* MYRINE.
MYRINE. How old wast thou, Cynisca?

CYNISCA [*laughing*]. I was ten! [*All laugh.*
Well—in due course, I reached eleven, still
I saw no reason to regret the step;
Twelve—thirteen—fourteen saw me still unchanged;
At fifteen it occurred to me one day
That marriage was a necessary ill,
Inflicted by the gods to punish us,
And to evade it were impiety!
At sixteen the idea became more fixed;
At seventeen I was convinced of it!

PYGMALION. In the meantime she'd seen Pygmalion.

MYRINE. And you confided all your doubts to him?

CYNISCA. I did, and he endorsed them—so we laid
The case before my mistress, Artemis;
No need to tell the arguments we used,
Suffice it that they brought about our end:
And Artemis, her icy stedfastness
Thawed by the ardour of Cynisca's prayers,
Replied, "Go, girl, and wed Pygmalion;
But mark my words—[*rises*]—whichever one of you,
Or he or she, shall falsify the vow
Of perfect conjugal fidelity—
The wronged one, he or she, shall have the power
To call down *blindness* on the backslider,
And sightless shall the truant mate remain
Until expressly pardoned by the other."

LEUCIPPUS. It's fortunate such powers as yours are not
In universal use; for if they were,
One half the husbands and one half the wives
Would be as blind as night; the other half
Having their eyes, would use them—on each other!

[MIMOS *enters from left and gives* PYGMALION *a scroll, which he reads at back. Exit* MIMOS *from left.*

MYRINE. But, then, the power of calling down this doom
Remains with thee. Thou wouldst not burden him
With such a curse as utter sightlessness,
However grievously he might offend.

CYNISCA [*earnestly*]. I love Pygmalion for his faithfulness;
The act that robs him of that quality
Will rob him of the love that springs from it.

MYRINE. But sightlessness—it is so terrible!

CYNISCA. And faithfulness—it is so terrible!
I take my temper from Pygmalion;
While he is godlike—he's a god to me,

And should he turn to devil, I'll turn with him.
I know no half-moods, I am love or hate!

MYRINE [*to* LEUCIPPUS]. What do you say to that?

LEUCIPPUS. Why, on the whole
I'm glad *you're* not a nymph of Artemis!

[*Exeunt* MYRINE *and* LEUCIPPUS, *right.*

PYGMALION. I've brought him to his senses. Presently
My patron Chrysos will be here to earn
Some thousand drachmas.

[*Indicating scroll brought by* MIMOS.

CYNISCA [*seated left*]. How, my love, to earn?
He is a man of unexampled wealth,
And follows no profession.

PYGMALION. Yes, he does:
He is a patron of the arts, and makes
A handsome income by his patronage.

CYNISCA. How so?

PYGMALION. He is an ignorant buffoon!
But purses hold a higher rank than brains,
And he is rich; wherever Chrysos buys,
The world of smaller fools comes following,
And men are glad to sell their work to him
At half its proper price, that they may say,
"Chrysos has purchased handiwork of ours."
He is a fashion, and he knows it well
In buying sculpture; he appraises it
As he'd appraise a master-mason's work,
So much for marble, and so much for time,
So much for working tools—but still he buys,
And so he is a patron of the arts!

CYNISCA. To think that heaven-born art should be the slave
Of such as he!

PYGMALION [*bitterly*]. Well, wealth is heaven-born too.
I work for wealth.

CYNISCA. Thou workest, love, for fame.

PYGMALION. And fame brings wealth. The thought's contemptible
But I can do no more than work for wealth.

CYNISCA. Such words from one whose noble work it is
To call the senseless marble into life!

PYGMALION. Life! Dost thou call that life?

CYNISCA. It all but breathes!

PYGMALION [*bitterly*]. It all but breathes—therefore it talks aloud!
It all but moves—therefore it walks and runs!
It all but lives, and therefore it is life!

No, no, my love, the thing is cold, dull stone,
Shaped to a certain form, but still dull stone,
[*Looking at statue.*
The lifeless, senseless mockery of life.
The gods make life, I can make only death!
[*Closing curtains and coming down.*

CYNISCA. Hush, my Pygmalion! the gods are good,
And they have made thee nearer unto them
Than other men; this is ingratitude!
Now I must go.
[*Crosses to right and covers her head with veil, which is on seat.*

PYGMALION. So soon, and for so long.

CYNISCA. One day, 'twill quickly pass away!

PYGMALION. With those
Who measure time by almanacks, no doubt,
But not with him who knows no days save those
Born of the sunlight of Cynisca's eyes;
It will be night with me till she returns.

CYNISCA. Then sleep it through, Pygmalion! But stay,
Thou shalt *not* pass the weary hours alone;
Now mark thou this—while I'm away from thee
There stands my only representative,
[*Indicating* GALATEA, *and withdrawing curtains.*
She is my proxy, and I charge you, sir,
Be faithful unto her as unto me!
Into her quietly attentive ear
Pour all thy treasures of hyperbole,
And give thy nimble tongue full license, lest
Disuse should rust its glib machinery; [*Going to him.*
If thoughts of love should haply crowd on thee,
There stands my other self, tell them to her,
She'll listen well; [*He makes a movement of impatience.*
Nay, that's ungenerous,
For she is I, yet lovelier than I,
And hath no temper, sir, and hath no tongue;
Thou hast thy license—make good use of it.
Already I'm half jealous [*looking at statue*]—there!
[*Draws curtains together, concealing statue.*
It's gone:
The thing is but a statue after all,
And I am safe in leaving thee with her;
Farewell, Pygmalion, till I return.
[*Kisses him and exit, right.*

PYGMALION [*bitterly*]. "The thing is but a statue after all!"
Cynisca little thought that in those words
She touched the keynote of my discontent—
True, I have powers denied to other men;
Give me a block of senseless marble—— Well,
I'm a magician, and it rests with me
To say what kernel lies within its shell; [*Proudly.*
It shall contain a man, a woman, child—
A dozen men and women if I will.
So far the gods and I run neck and neck—
Nay, so far I can beat them at their trade;
*I* am no bungler—all the men *I* make
Are straight-limbed fellows, each magnificent
In the perfection of his manly grace:
*I* make no crook-backs—all *my* men are gods,
My women goddesses—in outward form.
But there's my tether [*sitting left*]—I can go so far,
And go no farther—at that point I stop,
To curse the bonds that hold me sternly back.
To curse the arrogance of those proud gods,
Who say, "Thou shalt be greatest among men,
And yet infinitesimally small!"
GALATEA [*from behind curtain, centre*]. Pygmalion!
PYGMALION [*after a pause*]. Who called?
GALATEA. Pygmalion!
[PYGMALION *looks off to left—then looks off to right—then goes to centre, tears away curtain, and discovers* GALATEA *alive. He kneels left of statue as in adoration.*
PYGMALION. Ye gods! It lives!
GALATEA. Pygmalion!
PYGMALION. It speaks!
I have my prayer! my Galatea breathes!
GALATEA. Where am I? Let me speak, Pygmalion;
Give me thy hand—both hands—how soft and warm!
[*She descends from pedestal*—PYGMALION *leading her, very slowly, down centre.*
Whence came I?
PYGMALION. Why, from yonder pedestal.
GALATEA. That pedestal! Ah, yes, I recollect,
There was a time when it was part of me!
PYGMALION. That time has passed for ever, thou art now
A living, breathing woman, excellent
In every attribute of womankind.

GALATEA. Where am I, then?
PYGMALION. Why, born into the world
By miracle!
GALATEA. Is this the world?
PYGMALION. It is.
GALATEA. This room?
PYGMALION. This room is portion of a house;
The house stands in a grove; the grove itself
Is one of many, many hundred groves
In Athens.
GALATEA. And is Athens then the world?
PYGMALION. To an Athenian—yes——
GALATEA. And am I one?
PYGMALION. By birth and parentage, not by descent.
GALATEA. But how came I to be?
PYGMALION. Well—let me see.
Oh—you were quarried in Pentelicus;
I modelled you in clay—my artisans
Then roughed you out in marble—I, in turn,
Brought my artistic skill to bear on you,
And made you what you are—in all but life—
The gods completed what I had begun,
And gave the only gift I could not give!
GALATEA. Then this is life?
PYGMALION. It is.
GALATEA. And not long since
I was a cold, dull stone. I recollect
That by some means I knew that I was stone—
That was the first dull gleam of consciousness;
I became conscious of a chilly self,
A cold immovable identity,
I knew that I was stone, and knew no more!
Then, by an imperceptible advance,
Came the dim evidence of outer things,
Seen—darkly and imperfectly—yet seen—
The walls surrounding me, and I, alone,
That pedestal—that curtain—then a voice
That called on Galatea! At that word,
Which seemed to shake my marble to the core,
That which was dim before came evident.
Sounds that had hummed around me—indistinct,
Vague, meaningless—seemed to resolve themselves
Into a language I could understand;
I felt my frame pervaded with a glow

That seemed to thaw my marble into flesh;
Its cold hard substance throbbed with active life,
My limbs grew supple, and I moved—I lived!
Lived in the ecstasy of new-born life;
Lived in the love of him who fashioned me;
Lived in a thousand tangled thoughts of hope—
Love—gratitude—thoughts that resolved themselves
Into one word, that word, Pygmalion! [*Kneels to him.*

PYGMALION. I have no words to tell thee of my joy,
O woman—perfect in thy loveliness!

GALATEA. What is that word? Am I a woman?

PYGMALION. Yes.

GALATEA. Art thou a woman?

PYGMALION. No, I am a man.

GALATEA. What *is* a man?

PYGMALION. A being strongly framed,
To wait on woman, and protect her from
All ills that strength and courage can avert;
To work and toil for her, that she may rest;
To weep and mourn for her, that she may laugh;
To fight and die for her, that she may live!
[*Leading her to seat, left. He sits on her left.*

GALATEA [*after a pause*]. I'm glad I am a woman.

PYGMALION. So am I.

GALATEA. That I escape the pains thou hast to bear?

PYGMALION. That I may undergo those pains for thee.

GALATEA. With whom then wouldst thou fight?

PYGMALION. With any man
Whose word or deed gave Galatea pain.
[*Puts his arm round her.*

GALATEA. Then there are other men in this strange world?

PYGMALION. There are indeed!

GALATEA. And other women?

PYGMALION [*withdrawing his arm*]. Yes;
Though for the moment I'd forgotten it!
Yes, other women.

GALATEA. And for all of these
Men work, and toil, and mourn, and weep, and fight?

PYGMALION. It is man's duty, if he's called upon,
To fight for all—he works for those he loves.
[*His arm round her waist.*

GALATEA. Then by thy works I know thou lovest me.

PYGMALION. Indeed, I love thee! [*Embraces her.*

GALATEA. With what kind of love?

PYGMALION. I love thee [*recollecting himself and releasing her*] as sculptor loves his work!
[*Aside*] There is diplomacy in that reply.
GALATEA. My love is different in kind to thine:
I am no sculptor, and I've done no work,
Yet I do love thee; say—what love is mine?
PYGMALION. Tell me its symptoms—then I'll answer thee.
GALATEA. Its symptoms? Let me call them as they come.
A sense that I am made *by* thee *for* thee;
That I've no will that is not wholly thine;
That I've no thought, no hope, no enterprise,
That does not own thee as its sovereign; [*Kneeling to him*
That I have life, that I may live for thee;
That I am thine—that thou and I are one!
[*Embraces him passionately—then, frightened at her earnestness, withdraws from him, still kneeling.*
What kind of love is that?
PYGMALION. A kind of love
That I shall run some risk in dealing with.
GALATEA. And why, Pygmalion?
PYGMALION. Such love as thine
A man may not receive, except indeed
From one who is, or is to be, his wife.
GALATEA. Then *I* will be thy wife. [*Again embracing him*
PYGMALION [*withdrawing from her*]. That may not be;
I have a wife—the gods allow but one.
GALATEA. Why did the gods then send me here to thee?
PYGMALION. I cannot say [*rises and crosses centre,* GALATEA *still kneeling*] unless to punish me
For unreflecting and presumptuous prayer!
I pray'd that thou shouldst live. I have my prayer,
And now I see the fearful consequence
That must attend it!
GALATEA [*rises and goes to his left*]. Yet thou lovest me?
PYGMALION. Who could look on that face and stifle love?
GALATEA. Then I am beautiful?
PYGMALION. Indeed thou art.
GALATEA. I wish that I could look upon myself,
But that's impossible.
PYGMALION. Not so indeed,
This mirror will reflect thy face. Behold!
[*Hands her a mirror*
GALATEA. How beautiful! I am very glad to know
That both our tastes agree so perfectly;

Why, my Pygmalion, I did not think
That aught could be more beautiful than thou,
Till I beheld myself. Believe me, love,
I could look in this mirror all day long.
So I'm a woman!

PYGMALION. There's no doubt of that!

GALATEA. Oh, happy maid to be so passing fair!
And happier still Pygmalion, who can gaze,
At will, upon so beautiful a face!

PYGMALION. Hush! Galatea—in thine innocence
[*Taking glass from her.*
Thou sayest words that never should be said.

GALATEA. Indeed, Pygmalion; then it is wrong
To think that one is exquisitely fair?

PYGMALION. Well, it's a confidential sentiment
That women cherish in their heart of hearts.
But, as a rule, they keep it to themselves.

GALATEA. And is thy wife as beautiful as I?

PYGMALION. No, Galatea, for in forming thee
I took her features—lovely in themselves—
And in the marble made them lovelier still.

GALATEA [*disappointed*]. Oh! then I'm not original?

PYGMALION. Well—no—
That is—thou hast indeed a prototype,
But though in stone thou didst resemble her,
In life, the difference is manifest.

GALATEA. I'm very glad I'm lovelier than she.
And am I better? [*Sits.*

PYGMALION [*standing*]. That I do not know.

GALATEA. Then she has faults?

PYGMALION. But very few indeed;
Mere trivial blemishes that serve to show
That she and I are of one common kin.
I love her all the better for such faults!
[*Sits left of* GALATEA.

GALATEA [*after a pause*]. Tell me some faults, and I'll commit them now.

PYGMALION. There is no hurry; they will come in time:
Though for that matter, it's a grievous sin
To sit as lovingly as we sit now.

GALATEA. Is sin so pleasant? If to sit and talk
As we are sitting be indeed a sin,
Why, I could sin all day! But tell me, love,
Is this great fault that I'm committing now

The kind of fault that only serves to show
That thou and I are of one common kin?

PYGMALION. Indeed, I'm very much afraid it is.

GALATEA. And dost thou love me better for such fault?
[*Embracing him*

PYGMALION. Where is the mortal who could answer "No"?

GALATEA [*releasing him*]. Why then I'm satisfied, Pygmalion;
Thy wife and I can start on equal terms.
She loves thee?

PYGMALION. Very much.

GALATEA. I'm glad of that.
I like thy wife.

PYGMALION. And why?

GALATEA [*surprised at the question*]. Our tastes agree.
We love Pygmalion well, and what is more,
Pygmalion loves us both. I like thy wife;
I'm sure we shall agree.

PYGMALION [*aside*]. I doubt it much.

GALATEA. Is she within?

PYGMALION. No, she is not within.

GALATEA. But she'll come back?

PYGMALION [*rising*]. Oh, yes, she will come back.

GALATEA [*rising and putting her arm round his neck*]. How pleased she'll be to know when she returns,
That there was some one here to fill her place!

PYGMALION [*drily*]. Yes, I should say she'd be extremely pleased.

GALATEA. Why, there is something in thy voice which says
That thou art jesting. Is it possible
To say one thing and mean another?

PYGMALION. Yes,
It's sometimes done.

GALATEA. How very wonderful;
So clever!

PYGMALION. And so very useful.

GALATEA. Yes.
Teach me the art.

PYGMALION. The art will come in time,
My wife will *not* be pleased; there—that's the truth.

GALATEA. I do not think that I *shall* like thy wife.
Tell me more of her.

PYGMALION. Well——

GALATEA. What did she say
When last she left thee?

PYGMALION. Humph! Well, let me see;

Ah! true, she gave thee to me as my wife—
Her solitary representative;
[*Tenderly*] She feared I should be lonely till she came,
And counselled me, if thoughts of love should come,
To speak those thoughts to thee, as I am wont
To speak to her! [*Embracing her.*

GALATEA. That's right.

PYGMALION [*releasing her*]. But when she spake
Thou wast a stone, now thou art flesh and blood,
Which makes a difference.

GALATEA. It's a strange world:
A woman loves her husband very much,
And cannot brook that I should love him too;
She fears he will be lonely till she comes,
And will not let me cheer his loneliness:
She bids him breathe his love to senseless stone,
And when that stone is brought to life—be dumb!
It's a strange world, I cannot fathom it.

PYGMALION [*aside*]. Let me be brave, and put an end to this.
[*Aloud*] Come, Galatea—till my wife returns,
My sister shall provide thee with a home;
Her house is close at hand.

GALATEA [*astonished and alarmed*]. Send me not hence,
Pygmalion—let me stay!

PYGMALION. It may not be.
Come, Galatea, we shall meet again.

GALATEA [*resignedly*]. Do with me as thou wilt, Pygmalion!
But we *shall* meet again?—and very soon?

PYGMALION. Yes, very soon.

GALATEA. And when thy wife returns,
She'll let me stay with thee?

PYGMALION. I do not know.
[*Aside*] Why should I hide the truth from her? [*Aloud*] Alas!
I may *not* see thee then.

GALATEA [*horrified*]. Pygmalion,
What fearful words are these?

PYGMALION. The bitter truth.
I may not love thee—I must send thee hence. [*Sits.*

GALATEA. Recall those words, Pygmalion, my love!
Was it for this that heaven gave me life?
Pygmalion, have mercy on me; see,
I am thy work, thou hast created me;
The gods have sent me to thee. I am thine,
Thine! only, and unalterably thine! [*Music.*

This is the thought with which my soul is charged.
Thou tellest me of one who claims thy love,
That thou hast love for her alone. Alas!
I do not know these things—I only know
That heaven has sent me here to be with thee.
[*Kneels at his right*

Thou tellest me of duty to thy wife,
Of vows that thou wilt love but her; alas!
I do not know these things—I only know
That heaven, who sent me here, has given me
One all-absorbing duty to discharge—
To love thee, and to make thee love again!
[*Putting her arms round him*

[*During this speech* PYGMALION *has shown symptoms of irresolution; at its conclusion he takes her in his arms and embraces her passionately.*

## ACT II

SCENE: *Same as Act I.* PYGMALION *discovered at work on the unfinished statue.*

PYGMALION. To-morrow my Cynisca comes to me;
Would that she never had departed hence!
It took a miracle to make me false,
And even then I was but false in thought;
A less exacting wife might be appeased
By that reflection. But Pygmalion
Must be immaculate in every thought,
Even though heaven's armaments be ranged
Against the fortress of his constancy!
[*Enter* MYRINE, *from right, in great excitement*

MYRINE. Pygmalion!
PYGMALION. Myrine!
MYRINE [*shrinking from him*]. Touch me not,
Thou hast deceived me, and deceived thy wife!
Who is the woman thou didst send to me
To share my home last night?
PYGMALION. Be pacified;
Judge neither of us hastily, in truth
She is as pure, as innocent as thou.

MYRINE. Oh, miserable man—confess the truth,
Disguise not that of which she boasts aloud.
PYGMALION. Of what, then, does she boast?
MYRINE. To all I say
She answers with one parrot-like reply,
"I love Pygmalion"—and when incensed
I tell her that thou hast a cheated wife,
She only says, "I love Pygmalion,
I and my life are his, and his alone!"
Who is this shameless woman, sir? Confess!
PYGMALION. Myrine, I will tell thee all. The gods,
To punish my expressed impiety,
Have worked a miracle, and brought to life
My statue Galatea!
MYRINE [*incredulously*]. Marvellous,
If it be true!
PYGMALION. It's absolutely true.
[MYRINE *goes up stage, opens the curtains, and sees the pedestal empty.*
MYRINE. The statue's gone! [GALATEA *appears at door, right.*
PYGMALION. The statue's at the door!
[MYRINE *looks in wonder at* GALATEA, *and gradually comes down to right.*
GALATEA [*coming down and embracing him*]. At last we meet! Oh, my Pygmalion!
What strange, strange things have happened since we met!
PYGMALION. Why, what has happened to thee?
GALATEA. Fearful things!
[*To* MYRINE] I went with thee into thine house——
MYRINE. Well, well.
GALATEA. And then I sat alone and wept—and wept
A long, long time for my Pygmalion.
Then by degrees—by tedious degrees,
The light—the glorious light!—the God-sent light—
I saw it sink—sink—sink—behind the world!
Then I grew cold—cold—as I used to be,
Before my loved Pygmalion gave me life;
Then came the fearful thought that, by degrees,
I was returning into stone again!
How bitterly I wept and prayed aloud
That it might not be so! "Spare me, ye gods!
Spare me," I cried, "for my Pygmalion,
A little longer for Pygmalion!
Oh, take me not so early from my love;

Oh, let me see him once—but once again!"
But no—they heard me not, for they are good,
And had they heard, must needs have pitied me;
They had not seen *thee*, and they did not know
The happiness that I must leave behind.
I fell upon thy couch [*to* MYRINE], my eyelids closed,
My senses faded from me one by one;
I knew no more until I found myself,
After a strange dark interval of time,
Once more upon my hated pedestal.
A statue—motionless—insensible.
And then I saw the glorious gods come down!
Down to this room! the air was filled with them!
They came and looked upon Pygmalion,
And looking on him, kissed him one by one,
And said, in tones that spoke to me of life,
"We cannot take her from such happiness!
Live Galatea for his love!" And then
The glorious light that I had lost came back—
There was Myrine's room, there was her couch
There was the sun in heaven; and the birds
Sang once more in the great green waving trees,
As I had heard them sing—I lived once more
To look on him I love!

MYRINE. 'Twas but a dream!
Once every day this death occurs to us,
Till thou and I and all who dwell on earth
Shall sleep to wake no more!

GALATEA [*horrified, takes* MYRINE'S *hand*]. To wake no more!

PYGMALION. That time must come, may be not yet awhile,
Still it must come, and we shall all return
To the cold earth from which we quarried thee.

GALATEA. See how the promises of new-born life
Fade from the bright hope-picture, one by one!
Love for Pygmalion—a blighting sin:
*His* love a shame that he must hide away;
Sleep, stone-like, senseless sleep, our natural state,
And life a passing vision born thereof!
How the bright promises fade one by one!

MYRINE. Why, there are many men whom thou mayst love;
But not Pygmalion—he has a wife.

GALATEA. Does no one love him?

MYRINE. Certainly—*I* do.
He is my brother.

GALATEA. Did he give thee life?
MYRINE. Why, no, but then——
GALATEA. He did not give thee life,
And yet thou lovest him! And why not I,
Who owe my very being to his love? [*Turning to him.*
PYGMALION. Well, thou mayst love me—as a father.
MYRINE. Yes;
He is thy father, for he gave thee life.
GALATEA. Well, as thou wilt; it is enough to know
That I may love thee. Wilt thou love me too?
PYGMALION. Yes, as a daughter; there, that's understood.
GALATEA. Then I am satisfied. [*Kissing his hand.*
MYRINE [*aside*]. Indeed, I hope
Cynisca also will be satisfied! [*Exit.*
GALATEA [*to* PYGMALION, *who crosses towards right*]. Thou art not going from me?
PYGMALION. For a while.
GALATEA. Oh, take me with thee; leave me not alone
With these cold emblems of my former self!
I dare not look on them! [*Alluding to statues.*
PYGMALION [*looking off*]. Leucippus comes,
And he shall comfort thee till I return;
I'll not be long!
GALATEA. Leucippus! Who is he?
PYGMALION. A valiant soldier.
GALATEA. What is that?
PYGMALION. A man
Who's hired to kill his country's enemies.
GALATEA [*horrified*]. A paid assassin!
PYGMALION [*irritated*]. An assassin! Bah!
There spoke the thoroughly untutored mind;
So coarse a sentiment might fairly pass
With mere Arcadians—a cultured state
Holds soldiers at a higher estimate.
In Athens, which is highly civilized,
The soldier's social rank is in itself
Almost a patent of nobility.
GALATEA. He kills! And he is paid to kill!
PYGMALION. No doubt.
But then he kills to save his countrymen.
GALATEA. Whether his countrymen be right or wrong?
PYGMALION. That's no affair of his—it's quite enough
That there are enemies for him to kill;
He goes and kills them when his orders come.

GALATEA. How terrible! Why, my Pygmalion,
How many dreadful things thou teachest me!
Thou tellest me of death—that hideous doom
That all must fill; and having told me this—
Here is a man whose business is to kill;
To steal from other men the priceless boon
That thou hast given me—the boon of life—
And thou defendest him!

PYGMALION. I have no time
To make these matters clear—but here he comes,
Talk to him—thou wilt find him kind and good,
Despite his terrible profession.

GALATEA [*in great terror*]. No!
I'll not be left with him, Pygmalion. Stay!
He is a murderer!

PYGMALION. Ridiculous!
Why, Galatea, he will harm thee not,
He is as good as brave. I'll not be long.
I'll soon return. Farewell! [*Exit right.*

GALATEA. I will obey
Since thou desirest it; but to be left
Alone with one whose mission is to kill!
Oh, it is terrible!

[*Enter* LEUCIPPUS, *from right, with a dead fawn.*

LEUCIPPUS. A splendid shot,
And one that I shall never make again!

[*Throws fawn on seat, right.*

GALATEA. Monster! Approach me not! [*Shrinking into left corner.*

LEUCIPPUS. Why, who is this?
Nay, I'll not hurt thee, maiden!

GALATEA. Spare me, sir!
I have not done thy country any wrong—
I am no enemy!

LEUCIPPUS. I'll swear to that!
Were Athens' enemies as fair as thou,
She'd never be at a loss for warriors.

GALATEA [*advancing*]. Oh, miserable man, repent! repent!
Ere the stern marble claim you once again.

[*Pointing to pedestal.*

LEUCIPPUS. I don't quite understand——

GALATEA. Remember, sir,
The sculptor who designed you little thought
That when he prayed the gods to give you life
He turned a monster loose upon the world.

See, there is blood upon those cruel hands!
Stand back and touch me not!

LEUCIPPUS [*aside*]. Poor crazy girl!
Why—there's no cause for fear—I'll harm thee not—
As for the blood, this will account for it.
[*Taking fawn from seat.*

GALATEA. What's that?

LEUCIPPUS. A little fawn.
[*Throws it on the ground at* GALATEA'S *feet.*

GALATEA [*kneeling*]. It does not move!

LEUCIPPUS. No, for I wounded her.

GALATEA. Oh, horrible!

LEUCIPPUS. Poor little thing! 'Twas almost accident;
I lay upon my back beneath a tree,
Whistling the lazy hours away—when, lo!
I saw her bounding through a distant glade;
My bow was handy; in sheer wantonness
I aimed an arrow at her, and let fly,
Believing that at near a hundred yards
So small a being would be safe enough,
But, strange to tell, I hit her. Here she is;
[*Stooping over her.*
She moves—poor little lady! Ah, she's dead!

GALATEA. Oh, horrible! oh, miserable man!
What have you done?—[*takes fawn into her arms*]—
Why, you have murdered her!
Poor little thing! I know not what thou art;
Thy form is strange to me; but thou hadst life,
And he has robbed thee of it!
[*Strokes fawn with her handkerchief, then rises and gives it back to* LEUCIPPUS.
Get you hence!
Ere vengeance overtake you!

LEUCIPPUS. Well, in truth,
I have some apprehension on that score.
It was Myrine's—though I knew it not.
'Twould pain her much to know that it is dead;
So keep the matter carefully from her
Until I can replace it.
[*Exit* LEUCIPPUS, *right, with fawn.*

GALATEA. Get you hence;
I have no compact with a murderer!
[*Enter* MYRINE.

MYRINE [*anxiously*]. Why, Galatea, what has frightened thee?

GALATEA. Myrine, I have that to say to thee
That thou must nerve thyself to hear. That man—
That man thou lovest—is a murderer!

MYRINE [*relieved*]. Poor little maid! Pygmalion, ere he left,
Told me that by that name thou didst describe
The bravest soldier that our country owns!
He's no assassin, he's a warrior.

GALATEA. Then what is an assassin?

MYRINE. One who wars
Only with weak, defenceless creatures. One
Whose calling is to murder unawares.
My brave Leucippus is no murderer.

GALATEA. Thy brave Leucippus is no longer brave,
He is a mere assassin by thy showing.
I saw him with his victim in his arms,
His wicked hands dyed crimson with her blood!
There she lay, cold and stark, her gentle eyes
Glazed with the film of death. She moved but once,
She turned her head to him and tried to speak,
But ere she could articulate a word
Her head fell helplessly, and she was dead!

MYRINE. Why, you are raving, girl! Who told you this?

GALATEA. He owned it; and he gloried in the deed.
He told me how, in arrant wantonness,
He drew his bow, and smote her to the heart.

MYRINE. *Leucippus* did all this! Impossible!
You must be dreaming!

GALATEA. On my life it's true.
See, here's a handkerchief which still is stained
With her life-blood—I stanched it with my hand.

MYRINE [*horrified*]. Who was his victim?

GALATEA. Nay—I cannot tell.
Her form was strange to me—but here he comes;
Oh! hide me from that wicked murderer! [*Crosses left.*

[*Enter* LEUCIPPUS *from right.*

MYRINE. Leucippus, can this dreadful tale be true?

LEUCIPPUS [*to* GALATEA, *aside*]. Thou shouldst have kept my secret.
See, poor girl,
How it distresses her. [*To* MYRINE] It's true enough,
But Galatea should have kept it close,
I knew that it would pain thee grievously.

MYRINE [*amazed at his coolness*]. Some devil must have turned
Leucippus' brain!
You did all this?

LEUCIPPUS. Undoubtedly I did.
I saw my victim dancing happily
Across my field of view—I took my bow,
And, at the distance of a hundred yards,
I sent an arrow right into her heart!
There are few soldiers who could do as much.
MYRINE [*aghast*]. Indeed, I hope that there are very few!
Oh, miserable man! [*Weeping.*
LEUCIPPUS. That's rather hard.
Congratulate me rather on my aim,
Of which I have some reason now to boast;
As for my victim—why, one more or less,
What does it matter? There are plenty left!
[*Turns towards* GALATEA, *who runs screaming up stage to left.*
And then reflect. Indeed, I never thought
That I should hit her at so long a range;
My aim was truer than I thought it was,
And the poor little lady's dead!
MYRINE [*in blank astonishment*]. Alas!
This is the calmness of insanity.
What shall we do? Go, hide yourself away.
LEUCIPPUS. But——
MYRINE. Not a word, I will not hear thy voice,
I will not look upon thy face again;
Begone! [LEUCIPPUS *turns to* GALATEA.
GALATEA. Go, sir, or I'll alarm the house!
LEUCIPPUS. Well, this is sensibility indeed!
Well, they are women—women judge these things
By some disjointed logic of their own,
Which no mere man pretends to understand.
I'm off to Athens—when your reason comes
Send for me, if you will. Till then, farewell.
[*Exit to right angrily.*
MYRINE. Oh, this must be a dream, and I shall wake
To happiness once more!
GALATEA [*jumping at the idea*]. A dream! no doubt!
[*Crosses to* MYRINE.
We both are dreaming, and we dream the same!
But by what sign, Myrine, can we tell
Whether we dream or wake?
MYRINE. There are some things
Too terrible for truth, and this is one.
[*Enter* PYGMALION *from right with the fawn*

PYGMALION. Why, what's the matter with Leucippus, girl?
I saw him leave the house, and mount his horse
With every show of anger. What's amiss?
MYRINE. A fearful thing has happened. He is mad,
And he hath done a deed I dare not name.
Did he say ought to thee before he left?
PYGMALION. Yes; when I asked him what had angered him
He threw me this. [*Showing fawn.*
GALATEA [*in extreme horror*]. His victim—take it hence!
I cannot look at it.
MYRINE. Why, what is this?
GALATEA. The being he destroyed in wantonness;
He robbed it of the life the gods had given.
Oh! take it hence, I dare not look on death!
MYRINE. Why, was this *all* he killed?
GALATEA [*astonished*]. All!!! And enough!
MYRINE. Why, girl—thou must be mad! Pygmalion,
She told me he had murdered somebody,
But knew not whom!
PYGMALION [*in great agitation*]. The girl will craze us all!
Bid them prepare my horse—I'll bring him back.
[*Exit* MYRINE, *left.*
GALATEA. Have I done wrong? Indeed, I did not know;
Thou art not angry with me?
PYGMALION. Yes, I am,
I'm more than angry with thee—not content
With publishing thine unmasked love for me,
Thou hast estranged Leucippus from *his* love
Through thine unwarrantable foolishness.
[*Enter* MIMOS *from right.*
MIMOS. Sir, Chrysos and his lady are without.
PYGMALION. I cannot see them now. Stay—show them in.
[*Exit* MIMOS.
[*To* GALATEA] Go, wait in there. I'll join thee very soon.
[*Exit* GALATEA.
[PYGMALION *goes to statuette and begins to work on it.*
*Enter* DAPHNE *from right.*
DAPHNE. Where is Pygmalion?
PYGMALION [*working*]. Pygmalion's here.
DAPHNE. We called upon you some few days ago,
But you were not at home—so being here
We looked around us and we saw the stone
You keep so carefully behind that veil.
PYGMALION [*turning to her*]. That was a most outrageous liberty.

DAPHNE. Sir! do you know me?
PYGMALION. You are Chrysos' wife.
Has Chrysos come with you?
DAPHNE. He waits without.
I am his herald to prepare you for
The honour he confers. Be civil, sir,
And he may buy that statue; if he should
Your fortune's made!
PYGMALION [*to* MIMOS]. You'd better send him in.
[*Enter* CHRYSOS *from right.*
[*Exit* MIMOS, *right.*
CHRYSOS. Well—is the young man's mind prepared?
DAPHNE. It is;
He seems quite calm. Give money for the stone,
I've heard that it is far beyond all price,
But run it down, abuse it ere you buy.
CHRYSOS [*to* PYGMALION]. Where is the statue that I saw last week?
PYGMALION [*at a loss*]. Sir, it's unfinished—it's a clumsy thing;
I am ashamed of it.
CHRYSOS. It isn't good.
There's want of tone; it's much too hard and thin;
Then the half-distances are very crude—
Oh—very crude indeed—then it lacks air,
And wind, and motion, massive light and shade;
It's very roughly scumbled; on my soul
The scumbling's damnable!
DAPHNE [*aside to him*]. Bethink yourself!
That's said of painting—this is sculpture!
CHRYSOS. Eh?
It's the same thing, the principle's the same;
Now for its price. Let's see—what will it weigh?
[*Aside to* DAPHNE.
DAPHNE [*aside*]. A ton, or thereabouts.
CHRYSOS [*aloud*]. Suppose we say
A thousand drachmas?
PYGMALION. No, no, no, my lord,
The work is very crude and thin, and then
Remember, sir, the scumbling——
CHRYSOS. Damnable?
But never mind, although the thing is poor,
'Twill serve to hold a candle in my hall.
PYGMALION. Excuse me, sir, poor though that statue be,
I value it beyond all price.
CHRYSOS. Pooh, pooh!

I give a thousand drachmas for a stone
Which in the rough would not fetch half that sum!

DAPHNE. Why, bless my soul, young man, are you aware
We gave but fifteen hundred not long since
For an Apollo twice as big as that!

PYGMALION. But pardon me, a sculptor does not test
The beauty of a figure by its bulk.

CHRYSOS. Ah! then *she* does.

DAPHNE. Young man, you'd best take care,
You are offending Chrysos! [*Exit right*

CHRYSOS. And his wife. [*Going*

PYGMALION. That's a calamity I must endure.
Sir, once for all, the statue's not for sale. [*Exit left*

CHRYSOS. Sir, once for all, I will not be denied;
Confound it—if a patron of the arts
Is thus to be dictated to *by* art,
What comes of that art patron's patronage?
He must be taught a lesson—Where's the stone?
[*Goes to pedestal and opens curtains*
It's gone!
[*He looks for the statue left of stage—gradually working down to left corner, then to centre. There he meets* GALATEA, *who has entered, right; he stares at her in astonishment.*
Hallo! What's this?

GALATEA. Are you unwell!

CHRYSOS. Oh, no—I fancied just at first—pooh, pooh!
Ridiculous! [*Aside*] And yet it's very like!
[*Aloud*] I know your face; haven't I seen you in—
In—in—— [*Puzzling himself*

GALATEA. In marble? Very probably.

CHRYSOS [*recovering himself*]. Oh, now I understand. Why this must be
Pygmalion's model! Yes, of course it is.
A very bold-faced woman, I'll be bound.
These models always are. Her face is fair,
Her figure, too, is shapely and compact.
[*Aloud*] Come hither, maiden.

GALATEA [*who has been examining him in great wonder*]. Tell me, what
*are* you?

CHRYSOS. What *am* I?

GALATEA. Yes. I mean, are you a man?

CHRYSOS. Well, yes; I'm told so.

GALATEA. Then believe them not,
They've been deceiving you.

CHRYSOS. The deuce they have!
GALATEA. A man is very tall, and straight, and strong,
With big, brave eyes, fair face, and tender voice.
I've seen one.
CHRYSOS. *Have* you?
GALATEA [*looking at him critically*]. Yes, you are no man.
CHRYSOS. Does the young person take me for a woman?
GALATEA. A woman? No; a woman's soft and weak,
And fair, and exquisitely beautiful.
*I* am a woman—you are not like me.
CHRYSOS. The gods forbid that I should be like you,
And farm *my* features at so much an hour!
GALATEA. And yet I like you, for you make me laugh;
You are so round and red, your eyes so small,
Your mouth so large, your face so seared with lines,
And then you are so little and so fat!
CHRYSOS [*aside*]. This is a most extraordinary girl.
GALATEA. Oh, stay—I understand—Pygmalion's skill
Is the result of long experience.
The individual who modelled you
Was a beginner very probably?
CHRYSOS [*puzzled*]. No. I have seven elder brothers. Strange
That one so young should be so very bold.
GALATEA [*surprised*]. This is not boldness, it is innocence;
Pygmalion says so, and he ought to know.
CHRYSOS. No doubt, but I was not born yesterday. [*Sits left.*
GALATEA. Indeed!—*I was.*
[*He beckons her to sit beside him. She sits right of* CHRYSOS.
*She looks curiously at him. He does not understand why.*
How awkwardly you sit!
CHRYSOS. I'm not aware that there is anything
Extraordinary in my sitting down.
The nature of the seated attitude
Does not leave scope for much variety.
GALATEA. I never saw Pygmalion sit like that.
CHRYSOS. Doesn't he sit like other men?
GALATEA. Of course!
He always puts his arm around my waist.
CHRYSOS. The deuce he does! Artistic reprobate!
GALATEA. But you do not. Perhaps you don't know how?
CHRYSOS. Oh, yes; I *do* know how!
GALATEA. Well, do it, then.
CHRYSOS. It's a strange whim, but I will humour her. [*Does so.*
You're sure it's innocence?

GALATEA. Of course it is.
I tell you I was born but yesterday.
CHRYSOS. Who is your mother?
GALATEA. Mother! what is that?
I never had one. I'm Pygmalion's child;
Have people usually mothers?
CHRYSOS. Well,
That is the rule.
GALATEA. But then Pygmalion
Is cleverer than most men.
CHRYSOS. Yes, I've heard
That he has powers denied to other men,
And I'm beginning to believe it! [*Aside.*
[*Enter* DAPHNE *from right.*
DAPHNE. Why,
What's this?
[CHRYSOS *quickly moves away from* GALATEA *to the other end of the seat.*
CHRYSOS. My wife!
DAPHNE. Can I believe my eyes?
[GALATEA *rises.*
Who is this woman? Why, how very like——
CHRYSOS. Like what?
DAPHNE. That statue that we wished to buy!
The selfsame face, the selfsame drapery!
In every detail it's identical!
Why, one would almost think Pygmalion,
By some strange means, had brought the thing to life.
So marvellous her likeness to that stone!
CHRYSOS [*aside*]. A very good idea, and one that I
May well improve upon. It's rather rash,
But desperate ills need desperate remedies.
[*Crossing to centre.*
[*Aloud*] Perceptive Daphne! You have guessed the truth
You say she's like the statue—so she is,
And well she may be, for the gods have worked
A miracle, and brought the stone to life!
DAPHNE. Bah! Do you think me mad?
GALATEA. His tale is true.
I was a cold unfeeling block of stone,
Inanimate—insensible—until
Pygmalion, by the ardour of his prayers,
Kindled the spark of life within my frame
And made me what I am!

CHRYSOS [*aside to* GALATEA]. That's very good;
Go on and keep it up.
DAPHNE. You brazen girl,
I am his wife!
GALATEA. His wife! [*To* CHRYSOS] Then get you hence.
I may not love you when your wife is here. [*Going from him.*
DAPHNE. Why, what unknown audacity is this?
CHRYSOS. It's the audacity of innocence;
Don't judge her by the rules that govern you,
She was born yesterday, and you were *not*!
[*Enter* MIMOS *from right.*
MIMOS. My lord, Pygmalion's here.
CHRYSOS [*aside*]. He'll ruin all.
DAPHNE [*to* MIMOS]. Who is this woman?
CHRYSOS. Why, I've told you, she——
DAPHNE. Stop, not a word! I'll have it from *his* lips!
GALATEA. Why ask him when I tell you?
DAPHNE. Hold your tongue!
[*To* MIMOS] Who is this woman? If you tell a lie
I'll have you whipped.
MIMOS. Oh, I shall tell no lie!
That is a statue that has come to life.
CHRYSOS [*aside to* MIMOS]. I'm very much obliged to you!
[*Gives him money and shakes his hand. Exit* MIMOS, *right.*
[*Enter* MYRINE *from left.*
MYRINE. What's this?
Is anything the matter?
DAPHNE. Certainly.
This woman——
MYRINE. Is a statue come to life!
CHRYSOS. I'm very much obliged to *you*! [*Shakes her hand.*
[*Enter* PYGMALION *from right.*
PYGMALION. How now,
Chrysos?
CHRYSOS. The statue——!
DAPHNE. Stop!
CHRYSOS. Let me explain.
The statue that I purchased——
DAPHNE. Let me speak.
Chrysos—this girl, Myrine, and your slave,
Have all agreed to tell me that she is——
PYGMALION. The statue, Galatea, come to life?
Undoubtedly she is!

CHRYSOS. It seems to me
I'm very much obliged to every one!
[*Shakes* PYGMALION's *hand and goes to* DAPHNE.
[*Enter* CYNISCA *from right.*

CYNISCA. Pygmalion, my love!
PYGMALION. Cynisca here!
CYNISCA. And even earlier than I hoped to be.
[*Aside*] Why, who are these? [*Aloud*] I beg your pardon, sir,
I thought my husband was alone.
DAPHNE [*maliciously*]. No doubt.
I also thought *my* husband was alone;
We wives are too confiding.
CYNISCA [*aside to* PYGMALION]. Who are these?
PYGMALION. Why, this is Chrysos, this is Daphne. They
Have come——
DAPHNE. On very different errands, sir.
[*To* GALATEA] Chrysos has come to see this brazen girl;
*I* have come after Chrysos——
CHRYSOS. As you keep
So strictly to the sequence of events
Add this—Pygmalion came after *you*!
CYNISCA [*alluding to* GALATEA, *who is seated left*]. Who is this lady?
Why, impossible!
DAPHNE. Oh, not at all!
CYNISCA [*turning to pedestal*]. And yet the statue's gone!
PYGMALION. Cynisca, miracles have taken place;
The gods have given Galatea life!
CYNISCA. Oh, marvellous! Is this indeed the form
That my Pygmalion fashioned with his hands?
[*Approaching* GALATEA *with great admiration.*
PYGMALION. Indeed it is.
CYNISCA. Why, let me look at her. [*Kneels right of* GALATEA.
Yes, it's the same fair face—the same fair form;
Clad in the same fair folds of drapery!
GALATEA. And dost thou know me then?
CYNISCA. Hear her! she speaks!
Our Galatea speaks aloud! Know thee?
Why, I have sat for hours, and watched thee grow;
Sat—motionless as thou—wrapped in his work,
Save only that in very ecstasy
I hurried ever and anon to kiss
The glorious hands that made thee all thou art!
Come—let me kiss thee with a sister's love. [*Kisses her.*
See, she *can* kiss!

DAPHNE. Yes, I'll be bound she can!
CYNISCA. Why, my Pygmalion, where is the joy
That ought to animate that face of thine,
Now that the gods have crowned thy wondrous skill?
CHRYSOS [*to* PYGMALION]. Stick to our story; bold-faced though she be, [*Alluding to* GALATEA.
She's very young, and may perhaps repent;
It's very sad to have to tell a lie,
But if it must be told—why, tell it well! [*Exit right.*
CYNISCA [*getting angry*]. I see it all. I have returned too soon.
DAPHNE. No, I'm afraid you have returned too late;
Cynisca, never leave that man again,
Or leave him altogether! [*Exit right.*
CYNISCA [*astonished*]. Why, what's this?
[*To* PYGMALION] Hast thou been false to all I said to thee
Before I left?
GALATEA. Oh, madam, bear with him,
Judge him not hastily; in every word,
In every thought he has obeyed thy wish.
Thou badst him speak to me as unto thee;
And he and I have sat as lovingly [*Crosses to* PYGMALION.
As if thou hadst been present to behold
How faithfully thy wishes were obeyed!
CYNISCA. Pygmalion! What is this?
PYGMALION [*to* GALATEA]. Go, get thee hence,
Thou shouldst not see the fearful consequence
That must attend those heedless words of thine!
GALATEA. Judge him not hastily, he's not like this
When he and I are sitting here alone.
He has two voices and two faces, madam,
One for the world, and one for him and me!
CYNISCA [*with suppressed passion, crosses to* PYGMALION, GALATEA *shrinks back*]. Thy wife against thine eyes! Those are the stakes!
Well, thou hast played thy game, and thou hast lost.
PYGMALION. Cynisca, hear me! In a cursed hour
I prayed for power to give that statue life.
My impious prayer aroused the outraged gods,
They are my judges, leave me in their hands.
I have been false to them, but not to thee!
Spare me!
CYNISCA. Oh, pitiful adventurer!
He dares to lose, but does not dare to pay.
Come, be a man! See *I* am brave enough
And I have more to bear than thou! Behold,

I am alone, thou hast thy statue bride!
Oh [*passionately*], Artemis, my mistress, hear me now
Ere I remember how I love that man,
And in that memory forget my shame:
If he in deed or thought hath been untrue,
Be just—and let him pay the penalty!

[PYGMALION, *with an exclamation, covers his eyes with his hands.*

GALATEA. Cynisca, pity him! [*Comes to* CYNISCA *and kneels.*

CYNISCA. I know no pity, woman; for the act
That thawed thee into flesh has hardened me
Into the cursed stone from which thou cam'st!
We have changed places; from this moment forth
Be thou the wife and I the senseless stone!

[*Thrusts* GALATEA *from her, who falls senseless at her feet.*
*Curtain drops quickly.*

## ACT III

SCENE: *Same as Acts I and II.*

*Enter* DAPHNE *from right.*

DAPHNE. It seems Pygmalion *has* the fearful gift
Of bringing stone to life. I'll question him
And ascertain how far that power extends.
[*Enter* MYRINE *from left, weeping.*
Myrine—and in tears! Why, what is wrong?

MYRINE. Oh, we were all so happy yesterday,
And now, within twelve miserable hours,
A blight has fallen upon all of us!
Pygmalion is blind as death itself—
Cynisca leaves his home this very day—
And my Leucippus has deserted me!
I shall go mad with all this weight of grief!

DAPHNE. All this is Galatea's work?

MYRINE [*weeping*]. Yes, all.

DAPHNE. But can't you stop her? Shut the creature up?
Dispose of her, or break her? Won't she chip?

MYRINE. No, I'm afraid not.

DAPHNE. Ah, were I his wife
I'd spoil her beauty! There'd be little chance
Of finding him and her alone again!

MYRINE. There's little need to take precautions now,
For he, alas, is blind!
DAPHNE. Blind! What of that?
Man has five senses; if he loses one,
The vital energy on which it fed
Goes to intensify the other four.
He had five arrows in his quiver; well,
He has shot one away, and four remain.
My dear, an enemy is not disarmed
Because he's lost one arrow out of five!
MYRINE. The punishment he undergoes might well
Content his wife!
DAPHNE. A happy woman that!
MYRINE. Cynisca happy?
DAPHNE. To be sure she is;
Pygmalion's wronged her, and she's punished him.
What more could woman want?

[*Enter* CYNISCA *from left.*

CYNISCA. What more? Why, this!
The power to tame my tongue to speak the words
That would restore him to his former self!
The power to quell the fierce, unruly soul
That battles with my miserable heart!
The power to say, "Oh, my Pygmalion,
My love is thine to hold or cast away,
Do with it as thou wilt; it cannot die!"
I'd barter half my miserable life
For power to say these few true words to him!
MYRINE. Why, then, there's hope for him?
CYNISCA. There's none indeed!
This day I'll leave his home and hide away
Where I can brood upon my shame. I'll fan
The smouldering fire of jealousy until
It bursts into an all-devouring flame,
And pray that I may perish in its glow!
DAPHNE. That's bravely said, Cynisca! Never fear
Pygmalion will give thee wherewithal
To nurture it.
CYNISCA [*passionately*]. I need not wherewithal!
I carry wherewithal within my heart!
Oh, I can conjure up the scene at will
When he and she sit lovingly alone!
I know too well the devilish art he works,
And how his guilty passion shapes itself!

I follow him through every twist and turn
By which he wormed himself into *my* heart;
I hear him breathing to the guilty girl
The fond familiar nothings of *our* love;
I hear him whispering into *her* ear
The tenderness that he rehearsed on me!
I follow him through all his well-known moods—
Now fierce and passionate, now fanciful,
And ever tuning his accursed tongue
To chime in with the passion at her heart.
Oh, never fear that I shall starve the flame! [*Rising.*
When jealousy takes shelter in *my* heart
It does not die for lack of sustenance!

DAPHNE. Come to my home, and thou shalt feed it there;
We'll play at widows, and we'll pass our time
Railing against the perfidy of man.

CYNISCA. But Chrysos——?

DAPHNE. Chrysos? Oh, you won't see him.

CYNISCA. How so?

DAPHNE. How so? I've turned him out of doors!
Why, does the girl consider jealousy
*Her* unassailable prerogative?
Thou hast thy vengeance on Pygmalion—
He can no longer feast upon *thy* face.
Well, Chrysos can no longer feast on mine!
I can't *put out* his eyes, I wish I could;
But I can *shut* them out, and that I've done.

CYNISCA. I thank you, madam, and I'll go with you.
[*Goes up towards right door,* MYRINE *stops her.*

MYRINE. No, no; thou shalt not leave Pygmalion;
He will not live if thou desertest him.
Add nothing to his pain—this second blow
Might well complete the work thou hast begun!

CYNISCA. Nay, let me go—I must not see his face;
For if I look on him I may relent.
Detain me not, Myrine—fare thee well!
[*Exit right,* MYRINE *follows her*

DAPHNE. Well, there'll be pretty scenes in Athens now
That statues may be vivified at will.
[CHRYSOS *enters from right unobserved.*
Why, I have daughters—all of them of age—
What chance is there for plain young women now
That every man may take a block of stone
And carve a family to suit his tastes?

CHRYSOS. If every woman were a Daphne, man
Would never care to look on sculptured stone!
[*Sentimentally*] Oh, Daphne!
DAPHNE. Monster—get you hence, away!
I'll hold no converse with you—get you gone.
[*Aside*] If I'd Cynisca's tongue I'd wither him!
[*Imitating* CYNISCA *to* CHRYSOS' *great surprise and alarm*] "Oh,
I can conjure up the scene at will,
Where you and she sit lovingly alone!
Oh, never fear that I shall starve the flame!
When jealousy takes shelter in *my* heart
It does not die for lack of sustenance!"
CHRYSOS. I'm sure of that! your hospitality
Is world-renowned. Extend it, love, to me!
Oh, take me home again!
DAPHNE. Home! no, not I!
Why, I've a gallery of goddesses,
Fifty at least—half-dressed bacchantes, too—
Dryads and water-nymphs of every kind;
Suppose I find, when I go home to-day,
That they've all taken it into *their* heads
To come to life—what would become of them,
Or me, with Chrysos in the house? No—no.
They're bad enough in marble—but in flesh!!!
I'll sell the bold-faced hussies one and all,
But till I've sold them, Chrysos stops outside!
CHRYSOS. What *have* I done?
DAPHNE. What have you not done, sir?
CHRYSOS. I cannot tell you—it would take too long!
DAPHNE. I saw you sitting with that marble minx,
Your arm pressed lovingly around her waist.
Explain *that*, Chrysos.
CHRYSOS. It explains itself:
I am a patron of the arts, my dear,
And I am very fond of statuary.
DAPHNE. Bah—I've artistic tastes as well as you,
But still, you never saw *me* sitting with
My arms around a stone Apollo's waist!
As for this "statue"—could I see her now,
I'd test your taste for fragments!
CHRYSOS. Spare the girl,
She's very young and very innocent,
She claims your pity.
DAPHNE. *Does* she!

CHRYSOS. Yes, she does.
If I saw Daphne sitting with her arm
Round an Apollo, I should pity *him.*
[*Putting his arm around her waist.*
DAPHNE [*relenting*]. *Would* you?
CHRYSOS. I should, upon my word, I should.
DAPHNE. Well, Chrysos, thou art pardoned. [*Embraces him.*] After all,
The circumstances were exceptional.
CHRYSOS [*aside*]. Unhappily, they were!
DAPHNE. Come home, but mind,
I'll sell my gallery of goddesses;
No good can come of animating stone.
CHRYSOS. Oh, pardon me—why every soul on earth
Sprang from the stones Deucalion threw behind.
[*Goes up and looks at statue of Venus.*
DAPHNE. But then Deucalion only threw the stones,
He left it to the gods to fashion them.
CHRYSOS [*aside—looking at her*]. And we who've seen the work the gods turned out,
Would rather leave it to Pygmalion!
DAPHNE [*takes* CHRYSOS' *arm and swings him round*]. Come along, do!
[*Exeunt, right.*
[*Enter* MYRINE *from right, in great distress.*
MYRINE. Pygmalion's heard that he must lose his wife,
And swears, by all the gods that reign above,
He will not live if she deserts him now!
What—what is to be done! [*Enter* GALATEA *from left.*
GALATEA. Myrine here?
Where is Pygmalion?
MYRINE. Oh, wretched girl!
Art thou not satisfied with all the ill
Thy heedlessness has worked, that thou art come
To gaze upon thy victim's misery!
Well, thou hast come in time!
GALATEA. What dost thou mean?
MYRINE. Why, this is what I mean—he will not live
Now that Cynisca has deserted him.
Oh, girl, his blood will be upon thy head!
GALATEA. Pygmalion will not live? Pygmalion die?
And I, alas, the miserable cause!
Oh, what is to be done?
MYRINE. I do not know.
And yet there is one chance—but one alone;

I'll tell him that his wife awaits him here.
He'll take thee for Cynisca; when he speaks
Answer thou him as if thou wast his wife.

GALATEA. Yes, yes, I understand.

MYRINE. Then I'll begone.
The gods assist thee in this artifice! [*Exit* MYRINE *left.*

GALATEA. The gods will help me, for the gods are good. [*Kneels.*
Oh, heaven, in this great grief I turn to thee,
Teach me to speak to him, as, ere I lived,
Cynisca spake to him. Oh, let my voice
Be to Pygmalion as Cynisca's voice,
And he will live—for her and not for me—
Yet he will live. I am the fountain-head

[*Enter* PYGMALION *from left, unobserved, led in by* MYRINE.

Of all the horrors that surround him now,
And it is fit that I should suffer this;
Grant this, my first appeal—I do not ask
Pygmalion's love; I ask Pygmalion's life!

[MYRINE *has led him to seat left, and then exit, right.*

[PYGMALION *utters an exclamation of joy. She rushes to him and falls at his feet.*

Pygmalion!

PYGMALION. I have no words in which
To tell the joy with which I heard that prayer.
Oh, take me to thy arms, my dearly loved!
And teach me once again how much I risked
In risking such a heaven-sent love as thine!

GALATEA [*believing that he refers to her*]. Pygmalion! my love! Pygmalion!
Once more those words! again! say them again!
Tell me thou forgivest me the ill
That I unwittingly have worked on thee!

PYGMALION. Forgive *thee*? Why, my wife—[GALATEA *recoils in horror*]—I did not dare
To ask *thy* pardon, and thou askest mine.
The compact with thy mistress Artemis
Gave thee a heaven-sent right to punish me.
I've learnt to take whate'er the gods may send.

GALATEA [*with an effort*]. But then, this woman, Galatea——

PYGMALION. Well?

GALATEA. Thy love for her is dead?

PYGMALION. I had no love.

GALATEA. Thou hadst no love?

PYGMALION. No love. At first, in truth,

In mad amazement at the miracle
That crowned my handiwork, and brought to life
The fair creation of my sculptor's skill,
I yielded to her god-sent influence,
For I had worshipped her before she lived
Because she called Cynisca's face to me;
But when she lived—that love died—word by word.

GALATEA [*with a great effort*]. That is well said; thou dost not love her, then?
She is no more to thee than senseless stone? [*Anxiously.*

PYGMALION. Speak not of her, Cynisca, for I swear
The unhewn marble of Pentelicus
Hath charms for me, which she, in all her glow
Of womanly perfection, could not match.

GALATEA [*with a great effort*]. I'm very glad to hear that this is so.
Thou art forgiven!
[*Kisses his forehead, and crosses, weeping, to right.*

PYGMALION [*still seated*]. Thou hast pardoned me,
And though the law of Artemis declared
Thy pardon should restore me to the light
Thine anger took away, the angered gods
Keep my eyes closed, perchance, lest they should rest
On her who caused me all this bitterness!

GALATEA. Indeed, Pygmalion—'twere better thus—
If thou couldst look on Galatea now,
Thy love for her perchance might come again!

PYGMALION. No, no.

GALATEA. They say that she endureth pains
That mock the power of words!

PYGMALION. It should be so.

GALATEA [*advancing and appealing to him*]. Hast thou no pity for her?
[CYNISCA *enters, unobserved, from right, and remains at entrance, listening.*

PYGMALION. No, not I.
The ill that she hath worked on thee—on me—
And on Myrine—surely were enough
To make us curse the hour that gave her life.
She is not fit to live upon this world!

GALATEA [*bitterly*]. Upon this worthy world, thou sayest well.
The woman shall be seen of thee no more.
[*Takes* CYNISCA'S *hand and leads her to* PYGMALION.
What wouldst thou with her now? Thou hast thy wife!
[CYNISCA *kneels on* PYGMALION'S *right.* GALATEA *backs to exit, right.* CYNISCA, *still kneeling, turns to* GALATEA,

*and is about to speak to her.* GALATEA *makes a gesture of silence, and exit, sobbing bitterly.* CYNISCA *then embraces* PYGMALION, *who recovers his sight.*

PYGMALION [*rising*]. Cynisca! see! the light of day is mine!
Once more I look upon thy well-loved face!
[*Enter* MYRINE *and* LEUCIPPUS *from right.*

LEUCIPPUS. Pygmalion! Thou hast thine eyes again!
Come—this is happiness indeed!

PYGMALION. And thou?
Myrine has recalled thee?

LEUCIPPUS. No, I came,
But more in sorrow than in penitence;
For I've a hardened and a bloodstained heart!
I thought she would denounce me to the law,
But time, I found, had worked a wondrous change;
The very girl, who half a day ago
Had cursed me for a ruthless murderer,
Not only pardoned me my infamy,
But absolutely hugged me with delight,
When she, with hungry and unpitying eyes,
Beheld my victim—at the kitchen fire!
The little cannibal!
[*Enter* GALATEA *from left. She comes slowly down centre, then kneels and kisses hem of* PYGMALION'S *tunic.*

MYRINE [*after a pause*]. Pygmalion!
See—Galatea's here!

PYGMALION [*who is occupied with* CYNISCA, *turns and sees* GALATEA].
Away from me,
Woman or statue! Thou the only blight
That ever fell upon my love—begone, [*She covers her eyes.*
For thou hast been the curse of all who came
Within the compass of thy waywardness!

CYNISCA. No, no—recall those words, Pygmalion,
Thou knowest not all.

GALATEA [*retreating*]. Nay, let me go from him;
That curse—his curse—still ringing in mine ears,
For life is bitterer to me than death!
[*She mounts the steps of pedestal.*
Farewell, Pygmalion—I am not fit [*Slow music to end.*
To live upon this world—this worthy world.
Farewell, Pygmalion. Farewell—farewell!
[*The curtains conceal her.*

CYNISCA. Thou art unjust to her as I to thee!
*Hers* was the voice that pardoned thee—not mine.

I knew no pity till she taught it me.
I heard the words she spoke, and little thought
That they would find an echo in my heart;
But so it was. I took them for mine own,
And, asking for thy pardon, pardoned thee!

PYGMALION [*amazed*]. Cynisca! Is this so?

CYNISCA. In truth it is!

GALATEA [*behind curtain*]. Farewell, Pygmalion! Farewell—farewell!

[PYGMALION *rushes to the veil and tears it away, discovering* GALATEA *as a statue on the pedestal, as in Act I.* CYNISCA *falls on seat, hiding her face.* LEUCIPPUS *and* MYRINE *stand,* MYRINE *hiding her face on* LEUCIPPUS' *breast.* PYGMALION *falls back, kneeling left of statue. Slow curtain.*

# THE VIRGIN GODDESS

## A TRAGEDY

### By RUDOLF BESIER

*First produced at the Adelphi Theatre, London, October 23, 1906*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Cresphontes, *King of Artis*
Althea, *the Queen*
Cleito, *the King's mother*
Hephæstion, *the King's brother*
Iphicles, *a captain*
The Virgin, *priestess of Artemis*
A Herald, Priest, Attendant

*The Chorus, Virgins, Warriors, Priests, and Citizens of Artis*

*The action takes place in the marble courtyard before the Temple of Artemis.*

IT is worth recalling that early in the century two people, lately members of the Benson Company in its most illustrious period, made gallant efforts to establish the Adelphi Theatre as the home of poetic drama. The management of Otho Stuart and Oscar Asche began with Mr J. B. Fagan's verse drama of the Italian Renaissance and *The Prayer of the Sword*; it produced *Hamlet* with H. B. Irving, *The Taming of the Shrew* with Miss Lily Brayton as Katharina, *Measure for Measure*, and *The Virgin Goddess*. The producing, robust and unpretentious, was aimed at the average playgoer, and the average playgoer made his average failure to appreciate poetic drama. *The Virgin Goddess*, one of the two plays by contemporary authors produced by this management, is too good to be forgotten. It was young work by an author who, after the failure of its audience, seems not to have essayed poetic drama again. He wrote in *Don* a comedy about a poet, nor is the poet's frenzy to be denied to the gorgeous *poseuse* who was his Lady Patricia; but verse appears not to have been used again by Mr Besier.

"The stage cannot regain its full vigour," writes Mr John Drinkwater, "until it has rediscovered poetry as its natural expression." Unfortunately the general public is secretly alarmed at the prospect of sitting through a play in verse, although it must be admitted that Miss Clemence Dane's *Will Shakespeare*, Stephen Phillips's *Paolo and Francesca*, and Professor Gilbert Murray's verse translations of *Hippolytus* and *The Trojan Women* won approbation from their audiences, and the revivals of Shakespeare are not always failures, even in this twentieth century.

A lofty theme naturally demands lofty language. In a big tragic play like *The Virgin Goddess* poetic treatment is inevitable; its emotion requires a wider sweep, a greater amplitude, than prose can give. It is probably the best work which Mr Rudolf Besier has yet achieved, although some people prefer his *Olive Latimer's Husband*, which appeared three years later. The author excels in plays which combine realism with fancy; virtuosity and a topsy-turvy idealism are his best fields.

In addition to the plays already mentioned, Mr Besier has collaborated with Mr H. G. Wells in the dramatized version of *Kipps*, with Mr Hugh Walpole in *Robin's Father*, and with Miss May Edginton in the enormously successful play *Secrets*.

The author attaches the following note to his play: "It is hardly necessary to say that *The Virgin Goddess* is not strictly modelled on the Attic drama. It was written for performance on the modern stage, and should be judged as an acting play, not as a literary *tour de force*."

*The marble courtyard before the Temple of Artemis. In the background left to centre a broad flight of steps leading to the temple. In front of the temple door is a statue of Artemis with an altar before it. A flight of steps leading to the King's palace, right. Deep blue sky and brilliant sunshine.*

*Three Warriors stand about the steps leading to the temple door. Almost immediately the curtain goes up two Warriors rush in.*

FIRST WARRIOR. Iphicles hath returned, and seeks the Queen.
SECOND WARRIOR [*one of them standing about the steps*]. Iphicles!
[*They evince excitement.*
FIRST WARRIOR. Even he. Last night he crept
Through the besiegers to the eastern wall
And clomb into the city all unscathed.
He beareth urgent news. Where is the Queen?
OTHER WARRIORS. What news? What news?
FIRST WARRIOR. News of our vanished army.
[*Tremendous excitement. They rush up to the newcomers.*
A WARRIOR. Now praise the gods!
ANOTHER WARRIOR. Are they alive, our men?
ANOTHER WARRIOR. Return they?
ANOTHER WARRIOR. Are they dead?
FIRST WARRIOR. He will not speak
His tidings save unto the Queen alone.
[IPHICLES *enters accompanied by two Warriors.*
THE WARRIORS. Iphicles, hail!
A WARRIOR. The news?
ANOTHER WARRIOR. Are they alive?
IPHICLES. My news is for the Queen. Go tell her, thou,
Iphicles hath returned. [*Exit a Warrior.*
A WARRIOR. We deemed, my friend,
That weary of our city and our King,
Thou hadst deserted to the rebels.
IPHICLES [*indignantly*]. What!
Ye dared impute such infamy to me?
Obedient to command, I left the city
On perilous quest, the which I have fulfilled.

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Ye deemed I had deserted! Are ye mad?

[*While he is speaking the sound of singing comes from the distance.*

What song is that?

A Warrior. The King hath doffed his arms
For priestly robes——

Iphicles [*with a sneer*]. Befits him well!

The Warrior. —and now
With ceremony to the temple goes,
There to instal before the inmost shrine
Of Artemis three virgins robed in white—
As is our custom in the hour of peril—
And at the shrine must these abide in prayer
Until the holy goddess speak her will.

Iphicles [*drawing two of the Warriors in front of him*]. Make not my presence known unto Cresphontes,
Ere I have spoken with the Queen.

A Warrior. 'Tis well.

[*The Chorus of seven Youths and seven Maidens, all robed in white, file singing on to the stage, down the palace steps, youths and maidens alternately. They are followed by seven Priests and three Virgins, the rear being brought up by* Cresphontes, *who bears a naked sword lying flat across his hands. The Chorus, singing all the while, form a wide semicircle about the statue, the Priests form up at the temple door, and the Virgins come to a stand between the statue and altar and facing the audience.* Cresphontes *pauses before the altar and facing the statue.*

Chorus of Youths

[*As they move up the stage.*

Long since a shepherd on the lonely hills
Of Arcady beheld in waking dream,
Parting with silver feet the daffodils
That fringed his highland stream,
And followed by her nymphs in fluttering race,
And with wild light upon her face,
Immortal beauty out of moonlight wrought,
Artemis armed and sandalled for the chase.

Chorus of Maidens

[*As they move up the stage.*

Singing wild songs that glimmering revel passed
Into the forest and were lost to him;

But fired with deathless love he followed fast
Through haunted woodlands dim,
And down still glens that only hunters know,
And over peaks of ancient snow,
And where the torrents of the mountain hurl
Thunder and foam unto the plain below.

CHORUS OF YOUTHS

Oh, fleet his feet, but fleeter far was she
Whose face had lured him from the mountain-side,
And by the margin of the alien sea,
He failed at last and died;
And the wild people of the shore that came
To tend his spirit's dying flame,
Caught from his tongue strange rumours of a dream
And mystic loveliness without a name.

CHORUS OF MAIDENS

And where he died there rose our city white
And lovely as her face for whom he died,
And in the gracious favour of her sight
We grew in power and pride,
And gathered lordly wealth from far away,
And palms of glory from the fray,
We sent our spears abroad, and fought and won,
And many cities passed beneath our sway.

CHORUS OF YOUTHS AND MAIDENS

[*They sing, raising imploring hands to the statue.*

But now upon the ridge of night we stand,
With unrelenting menace at our gate,
And cry in vain for thy sustaining hand
And for thy counsel wait.
O tender healer of the wounded deer!
O Refuge for all things in fear!
Forsake us not in this the hour of need,
O Virgin Goddess, hear!

[*At the last line they all sink on their knees and remain thus during* CRESPHONTES' *prayer, their hands outstretched to the statue.*

CRESPHONTES. Goddess, who lendest no unwilling ear
To the lone cry of forest things pursued,
The cornered wolf, the stricken hind, oh, hear!

For we, thy children, on the perilous edge
Of ruin call upon thee as of old
We called on thee, nor ever called in vain.
Then with wise counsel or with sudden hand
Didst thou repel the foeman and defend
Thy virgin city from his ravishing sword.
Lo, now, in this extreme of agony
Wilt thou withhold thy counsel and thine aid?
Have we failed aught in reverence? From thy shrines
Have not the winds borne sweetest smoke to thee
And solemn litanies and silver hymns?
Hail, then, and hearken for we can no more,
And lift thy hand before the doom descend!

[*He tends the altar, and a thick smoke rises. Meanwhile* ALTHEA *enters hurriedly and looks anxiously about her.*

ALTHEA [*half aside*]. Iphicles . . .

IPHICLES [*in a low voice*]. Queen!

ALTHEA [*in a whisper*]. Hephæstion, hath he come?

IPHICLES [*as before*]. He cometh!

ALTHEA [*with intense relief*]. Ah—I praise the gods—nay, hush!
No word of this. . . .

CRESPHONTES. Goddess, behold I come,
Crushed and despairing, to thy holiest place
To offer thee as bitter sacrifice
This sword that never yet failed in the field,
But now upon the brink of doom seems reft
Of power to save.

[*He lays the sword with ceremony on the altar.*

IPHICLES [*to* ALTHEA]. But other news I bring.
I fear our host hath perished out at sea.

ALTHEA. Alas! . . . This tell the King, but of Hephæstion
No word. . . . And when these go, abide with me.

CRESPHONTES [*to those assembled*]. Queen, and ye men of Artis, hope that dies
Last of all gifts divine bestowed on man,
Our hope hath sickened and is nigh to death.
Those that sailed forth to wage our wars afar,
And crush the rival cities of the north,
Return not, and no tidings of their fate
Reach us; we know not if they be submerged
Under the waves of battle or the sea.

IPHICLES [*standing forward*]. Alas, my King! I come with bitter news.

CRESPHONTES. Iphicles! . . . Whence art thou? I deemed thee lost.
Or traitor. . . .

ALTHEA. Secretly I sent him forth
To glean what news he might of our lost arms.
CRESPHONTES [*frowning*]. Thy ways are strange and dark, Althea. . . .
Howbeit,
He is returned. . . . Speak out. What news?
IPHICLES. O King,
I wandered far, and gained no news at all
Save that our ships had never reached their goal.
For sundry travellers journeying from the north
Told me those cities that we swore to crush
Still tower predominant shining o'er the sea.
But wending homeward down a lonely coast,
I came upon a man half dead with fight,
'Gainst the confederate powers of wind and wave
And weariness, and looking in his face
Knew him for one of that great host of ours
That sailed long since to war—Phaon. . . .
[*Great sensation.*
He died
Clasped in my arms, and dying told his tale.
How that our ships a few brief leagues from home
Were seized by the storm and driven night and day
Across the fury of unbridled seas.
And he one night was grasped by a great wave
And dragged into the rolling waste; but Fate
Had flung a floating spar within his reach.
On this he buoyed himself and after hours
Of agony was hurled upon a shore,
Whence he toiled onward starving to the place
I found him, and so died. Now many moons
Have passed since storm attacked those goodly ships.
Had they survived we surely should have heard.
[*A tragic silence.*
CRESPHONTES. Alas, 'tis certain the waves cover them.
So now, ye men of Artis, hear my words.
Shorn of our strength, we have lured into revolt
The states and cities vassal to our own,
And close environed by rebellious spears
And three to one outnumbered, we stand here
Helpless, and through the gates and past the guards
Pestilence crawls with famine at her heels.
I have fought and failed, and can no more, but come
Hither to-day, no warrior, but a priest,
To lead, as ancient ritual prescribes,

These virgins to the shrine of Artemis.
There shall they stand in silent prayer immersed
Until she breathe her will into their souls.
And I myself have laid aside my sword,
My father's dreadful sword of fierce renown,
And come to pray——

ALTHEA [*contemptuously*]. Methinks the goodlier prayer
Were to go forth all armed as a man should,
And fight as should a man!

A WARRIOR. The Queen speaks well.
[*Murmurs of approbation.*

ANOTHER WARRIOR. Leave prayer to boys and girls.
[*Reiterated murmurs.*

CRESPHONTES. What words be these?
Think you I would not gladlier grasp my sword
And with my warriors rush on glittering death?
The heavier task secures the costlier prize.

ALTHEA [*passionately*]. Ay, so you said when those that now lie crouched
Without the city gates, like beasts of prey,
First raised their heads in insolent revolt.
The heavier task secures the costlier prize.
Then was the heavier task concession mild
And feeble pandering to their sly demands,
The costlier prize—thou hast gained the costlier prize—
Death at their hands—dishonour—ruin. . . .

CRESPHONTES. Enough!
Of the dead past, let Artemis be judge.
The future is mine own, subject to Fate.

A WARRIOR. Fate had Hephæstion, were Hephæstion here,
Closed with and overcome.
[*Shouts of approbation.* IPHICLES *makes as though to speak.*

ALTHEA [*in a quick whisper, catching his wrist*]. Be still! . . .

CRESPHONTES. Hephæstion
Is far away; he has no love for home.
His city may go down into the dust—
What care to him?

ALTHEA. A lie. You drove him forth
With bitter insults from a jealous heart.
He loved his city—but he loathed his king—
His brother—and a coward. . . .

CRESPHONTES. I'll not endure
To hear his name—from thy lips least of all,
Woman!

ALTHEA. His very name is dread for thee.

CRESPHONTES. No more.
[*Darkly*] I have heard enough to read thy heart.
[*To the Warriors*] Do ye, each man, to his allotted post
Return.
[*To the Priests*] Lead on into the temple.
[*The Priests, the Chorus, the Virgins, and finally* CRESPHONTES *pass into the temple.*
A WARRIOR [*to the* QUEEN, *who stands motionless with averted face*].
Queen,
I speak for these: do thou but give command,
And we will fling the gates apart and fall
Like a thunderbolt upon the enemy.
WARRIORS. Ay, speak! Command!
ALTHEA [*coldly*]. Did you not hear the King
Bid you to your allotted posts? . . .
[*They move uneasily away. The* QUEEN *stays them.*
My friends,
Go: it is good to obey. But as ye go,
Take comfort. Soon may dawn the hour when one,
Whose valour not a god may quench, will lead
The ordered fury of your storming spears
Straight to their goal. . . .
A WARRIOR [*as they go out*]. What means the Queen?
ANOTHER WARRIOR. I know not.
[*Exeunt all save* ALTHEA *and* IPHICLES.
ALTHEA. At last we are alone. . . . Now tell me quick
How found you him? His words? And where is he?
IPHICLES. Under a mystery of midnight boughs
In a dreamy folding of the Arcadian hills
I met him bearing to a little shrine
An offering for the goddess of his soul.
He is a votary of Artemis,
Virgin and wholly dedicate to her,
A mighty hunter of the hills is he,
Far famed for deeds of prowess in the chase.
O Queen, I told him of our army lost,
And of Cresphontes' weak, unstable rule;
I told him of our vassals' swift revolt;
How we were driven back by force of arms
Within the city; of the city's plight,
Zoned all about with bright, relentless steel,
Pestilence-stricken, famine-wasted. . . .
ALTHEA. Ah!
Was he not moved?

IPHICLES. Nay, Queen, he laughed and said:
"Let that fell hound, Cresphontes, reap the harvest
His hand hath sown!" And all in vain I prayed:
"Come down and help us!" Then I spake thy name
And told him it was thou that sent me forth.

ALTHEA [*in a whisper*]. And then?

IPHICLES. A great light leapt into his eyes,
He flung his leopard-skin about his form,
And spake no word, but bade me lead the way.
And after many days of tireless march
We reached the rebel lines. Then he with art
Most cunning passed unharmed among the foe.
I left him there to spy upon their plans
And learn their leaguered might. Before the sun
Touches the sea he swore to gain our walls.

ALTHEA [*half aside*]. For ten long years I have not seen thy face,
Hephæstion. . . . How looked he, Iphicles?

IPHICLES. Bearded and vast and thewed as Heracles,
And in his motion free as mountain winds
And irresistible as mountain floods
In autumn, and his eyes are bold and pure
As are the eyes of one that knows not love.

ALTHEA [*slowly*]. As are the eyes of one that knows not love. . . .
[CLEITO *falters slowly down the palace steps.*

IPHICLES [*in a low voice*]. Althea, the mother of the King is here.

ALTHEA. Go then, my friend, but tell this news to none.
[*Exit* IPHICLES
Cleito . . . [*Goes up to her and takes her hand.*
Thy hands are cold.

CLEITO. Ay, cold, so cold
I think I never shall be warm again. . . .
Lead me into the sun I cannot see.

ALTHEA. Thou standest in the sunshine. Art thou sick?

CLEITO. Ay, sick with apprehensions horrible.

ALTHEA. Open thy heart, beloved.

CLEITO. I must speak.
I have been silent long, now I must speak,
And warn thee of thy peril imminent—
Peril that comes in a beloved form,
And urged by Fate malign.

ALTHEA. Peril to me?

CLEITO. Home from his wanderings somewhere in the world
Hephæstion returns . . .

ALTHEA [*amazed*]. Hephæstion!
[*Aside*] How did she hear?
Well, and what then!
CLEITO. What then?—
The avalanche of gathered doom on thee.
ALTHEA. On me? On me? What means this drift of words?
How canst thou know Hephæstion returns?
And how should his return bring doom on me?
CLEITO. Listen. What time ten years ago you wed
The King, Hephæstion bode with us awhile,
And every night he slept within our walls
Upon my soul there crept an awful dream.
Against a blackness blacker than the night
That broods for evermore on these blind eyes
Stood robed in white and veiled a woman's form,
And all adown the whiteness of her robe,
Down to her feet, poured a bright stream of blood.
All motionless as Niobe she stood,
Until that crimson torrent ceased to flow;
Then with dead hand she raised her veil and bared
Her bosom. . . . Lo, between her breasts the hilt
Of the King's sword stood out. . . . And every night
So long as he abode within our walls
That dream returned. . . . But when the hate that lives
Between my sons brake into open strife,
And from our walls Hephæstion stormed away,
My sleep passed dreamless into morn. Last night
The dream returned. . . . [*She buries her face in her hands.*
ALTHEA. But me this dream concerns not,
Even should Hephæstion return to Artis.
CLEITO. The face of the dead woman and thy face
Were one.
ALTHEA. But thou hast never seen my face.
Blind were thine eyes long, long before we met.
CLEITO. And yet I know the dead face was thy face. . . .
Kneel. [ALTHEA *kneels before her.*
I am blind— [*Feels* ALTHEA'S *face.*
And yet my hands have eyes—
My hands have eyes. Not living as this face,
But like to alabaster, white and dead,
And awful in triumphant agony—
And yet thy face . . . thy face. . . .
ALTHEA [*pushing* CLEITO'S *hands away and rising*]. I'll not believe it.
These be sick fancies of the fevered brain.

[*Aside*] And yet these fancies told her that he comes,
And told her truly. . . . Ah! [*Sound of approaching shouts.*

CLEITO [*rising to her feet*]. What sounds be these?

ALTHEA [*in a whisper*]. Can it be he?

[*The sound grows louder.* IPHICLES *rushes in.*

IPHICLES. O Queen, he is here!

ALTHEA [*in a whisper*]. So soon?

CLEITO. Who spake but now?

IPHICLES. I, Iphicles.

CLEITO. Then tell me—
For it seems a chill wind blows upon my heart—
What mean these shouts?

ALTHEA [*with a sign to* IPHICLES]. It is thy son.

CLEITO. My son?

IPHICLES. That borne with jubilation hither comes.

CLEITO [*with sudden animation*]. My son, the King, Cresphontes, borne along,
Triumphant out of victory returned!
They said his father's spirit in him was dead.
They lied, such lofty spirit cannot die!
Lead him to me that I may kiss his brow,
My son, the King.

[*Several Warriors rush shouting on to the stage. They form an avenue for* HEPHÆSTION, *who enters, a leopard-skin thrown over his head and armour. Seeing* ALTHEA, *he starts back and stands for a moment staring at her as though in fear. The shouting dies down into silence.*

ALTHEA. Thy mother calls for thee.

HEPHÆSTION [*turning to* CLEITO]. Mother! [*Takes her hands.*

CLEITO [*drawing them away with a cry*]. O me, what son is this?

ALTHEA. Hephæstion!

HEPHÆSTION Beloved Mother, it is I. [*Seeks to embrace her.*

CLEITO [*vehemently repulsing him*]. Away!
The world is wide. Get hence into the world!
Put the resisting hills 'twixt thee and us,
The untravelled deserts and the lonely seas!
Go, as you love me—go!

HEPHÆSTION. What words are these?
What sorry greeting after many years? [*Takes her hands.*
Ah, but thy hands are marble cold, beloved!
Why dost thou tremble?

CLEITO. Ask me not, but go!

[*Suddenly holding his hand to her heart.*

O child, I yearn toward thee with a love

Strong as the terror which impels my tongue
To bid thee leave our city to its fate. . . .
Althea, speak: beseech him to return
Into that far-off land from whence he came
To menace thee and thine. . . .

HEPHÆSTION. From whence I came
To menace thee, Althea? I grope in gloom.
What meaning underlies these mystic words?

ALTHEA. She is ill and visited with evil dreams
Which fever conjures into warnings——

CLEITO. Nay——

ALTHEA. Be still. I charge thee say no more. Thy son
Comes hither with a glorious rage inspired,
And to fulfil the purpose of the gods.
Hephæstion, speak.

HEPHÆSTION. I come to give my arm
And brain to Artis. I am here to assist
The resurrection of her lofty name,
That now lies trampled in the shameful dust,
To avert with stubborn force the impending doom,
And wash with blood these insults from her face,
And seal the sorry breaches in our walls
With the red spoil of war. Not yours henceforth
To await behind a fence of crumbling stone,
Like cornered rats, a miserable death.
What though we be outnumbered man for man,
We are mighty in a passion for revenge,
And in the conquering worship of our land!
Oh, now for you the broad and open field,
The shock and countershock of charging spears,
The long-drawn thunder of the earth that shudders
Under the tramp of feet and galloping hoofs;
The glory and gloom and all the pomp and sound
Of unrelenting battle to the death.
All this my presence here in Artis means:
Hither I came to lead you forth and fight
Up to a stern and iron-crashing close.

[*Tumultuous cheers from those assembled.*

Praise ye the Queen, for it was she whose voice
Urged me to Artis from afar.

THE WARRIORS [*with a great shout*]. Althea!

CLEITO [*to* ALTHEA]. Is this the truth? Did thy voice urge him hither?

ALTHEA. Yes.

CLEITO. Then I say no more. Let come what will,
I am resigned. We may not parry Fate.
[*Exit, led by a Warrior.*
[*A Priest enters from the temple door.*
THE PRIEST. The King is much in wrath and bids me learn
Wherefore ye raise these shoutings and disturb
The solemn rites within the temple.
ALTHEA. Tell him
We have more cause for shouts than he for prayer.
Hephæstion hath returned.
PRIEST [*amazed*]. Hephæstion, thou!
HEPHÆSTION. Even so, my friend, 'tis I. Go tell the King
I await him here.
PRIEST. 'Tis well. [*Exit.*
HEPHÆSTION. What does the King?
ALTHEA. Safe in the shrine of Artemis, he prays
With boys and girls assembled. Lo, his sword,
Thy father's dreadful sword of fierce renown,
A sacrifice upon the altar lies!
He hath doffed his arms and donned the garb of priest.
The enemy storm our gates and crush our walls.
We starve within. He prays with boys and girls. [*Murmurs.*
HEPHÆSTION. My father's sword! [*He takes it from the altar.*
Alas, what depths we have reached!
O friends, this sword it was that made our name
Shine with prevailing glory in the world.
Once was this sword the terror of our foes
When in my father's unremorseful hand
It flashed, a very thunderbolt of Zeus!
Now in this sombre hour it lies untouched,
Harmless, neglected. Lo, the very blade
Is dull with shame! [*Murmurs.*
A WARRIOR. But thou canst make it clean!
ANOTHER WARRIOR. Take thou thy father's sword and lead us on!
ANOTHER WARRIOR. We'll follow thee till death and out beyond!
[*Tumultuous shouts.*
HEPHÆSTION. 'Tis well; but now I charge you to your posts,
There to await me. In disguise I have crept
Among the rebels and have learned their plans,
And formed mine own. Be ready; for to-night
We sally forth in quest of victory.
[*Exeunt all except* HEPHÆSTION *and* ALTHEA.
[*There is a moment's silence. Buckling his father's sword on his thigh, he approaches her.*

Althea, is this indeed thy face I see?

ALTHEA [*looking away*]. Why dost thou ask?

HEPHÆSTION. Thy face . . . so strange it seems
And like a memory of long ago. . . . [*Takes her hands.*
Look at me. Dost thou still recall that hour
When first we met?

ALTHEA [*drawing away her hands*]. That hour when first we met?
It was the night before my marriage morn.
I could not sleep, and rose and wandered away
By the seashore . . .

HEPHÆSTION. And I, approaching Artis
From seaward, came upon thee loitering
Under the moon and in the sound of waves.

ALTHEA. Ah, how thy presence startled me—so vast
In the dim light!

HEPHÆSTION. And like a spirit thou,
Strayed from the shadow valleys of the dead:
White was thy robe and white thy hands, and whiter
Thy face, Althea.

ALTHEA. My heart was full of trouble.

HEPHÆSTION. We talked awhile and parted dreamily.

ALTHEA. When next we met I was thy brother's wife. [*She looks away; a pause, then with animation*] And then how suddenly you left the city—
Too suddenly to bid me one farewell!

HEPHÆSTION. Yea, for I left in the white heat of wrath
Against Cresphontes. From the womb we grew
In hate together, and as the years went by
That mutual hatred kindled more and more,
Until at length it brake into wild flame
After he wed thee. . . . And I left my land
For ever, as I deemed.

ALTHEA [*smiling*]. But thou art here.

HEPHÆSTION [*with sudden ardour*]. Could I resist the voice that called me home—
Thy voice, Althea? [*Touches her hand.*

ALTHEA [*drawing it away*]. And all those many years
We dwelt apart how fared the world with thee?
Thou art a votary of Artemis,
A mighty hunter. Tell me all.

HEPHÆSTION. O Queen,
How good it was to feel the long, soft winds
Breathing upon my face from the unknown!
The enormous ocean liberty was mine,

And mine the earth, and I was free to choose.
I wandered far into the sunset gold
And far into the morn, and north and south
Revealed their secret wonders to my gaze.
But in the hills of Artemis my soul
Found home, and then my wandering feet were still.
I built a hut for shelter from the storm,
I built a little shrine to Artemis,
And gave myself to her, and lived the life
Of a free hunter roaming in the woods,
Careless, untrammelled, unallied—a man.

ALTHEA [*as though to herself*]. And yet more surely bound than others. . . .

HEPHÆSTION. I!
How so?

ALTHEA. Art thou not bound to Artemis
With vows that only death can break?

HEPHÆSTION. 'Tis true.

ALTHEA [*in a low, passionate voice*]. Others may taste the sweets of human love—
Not thou. . . .

HEPHÆSTION [*hoarsely, seizing her hands*]. Althea!

ALTHEA [*in a strangled voice*]. Let go my hands. . . .
[*She frees herself, and as the temple door opens passes out up the palace steps. Enter* CRESPHONTES *from the temple. The brothers regard each other silently.*

CRESPHONTES [*harshly*]. Put back
My sword.

HEPHÆSTION. Thy sword——

CRESPHONTES. I tell thee put it back
Upon the holy altar where it lay.
To Artemis I sacrificed my sword.
How darest thou——

HEPHÆSTION. I dared because I knew
Such sacrifice were loathsome in her eyes.
[*With an exclamation of fury* CRESPHONTES *advances towards him.*
Let be. I put it back again to rest
In shame awhile, obedient to thy will.
[*In silence he goes to the altar and lays the sword upon it, then turns to* CRESPHONTES *with a sudden change of manner.*
Nay, brother, for I come not here in wrath,
But hither drawn by deathless love I come!

Now in this hour of reconciling peril
Let us be one and burn up ancient feuds
And smouldering hatred of the sundered years
In one embracing flame of patriot love.

CRESPHONTES. I never sought thy hurt or crossed thy will,
Save in defence of my just right as King.
Whence art thou?

HEPHÆSTION. From Arcadia, where I dwell,
A hunter dedicate to Artemis,
Among the hills made holy by her feet.

CRESPHONTES. Why art thou here?

HEPHÆSTION. How canst thou ask? Is Artis
So safely 'stablished that her sons may roam
The world unmindful of her welfare?

CRESPHONTES. Ah! . . .
This sudden patriot love is strange and new
And sits upon thee well.
How came the tidings
Of our sore straits to thee?

HEPHÆSTION. Through Iphicles.

CRESPHONTES [*in a changed voice*]. Iphicles?

HEPHÆSTION. Well, what then?

CRESPHONTES. Iphicles went,
Obedient to Althea's secret word,
To search for tidings of our vanished ships.

HEPHÆSTION. Well?

CRESPHONTES. And he seems among the Arcadian hills
To have sought them and—found thee.

HEPHÆSTION. Have I denied it?
What willst thou more?

CRESPHONTES. I fain would hear thee say
That Iphicles went forth without command
To seek thee.

HEPHÆSTION. Were that then so strange?

CRESPHONTES. So strange
I'd not believe it. Nay, my friend, we know
It was my wife, Althea, who sent for thee.

HEPHÆSTION. Well, and what then?

CRESPHONTES. Oh, food for laughter merely!
Dost thou remember thy tremendous oath
Never again to pass within these walls?
But when Althea beckons thee, the oath
Dissolves in air, and like a faithful dog
Hephæstion returns.

HEPHÆSTION. I am here to-day
Because I know that Artis needs a man.
Fighters there be, and priests there be who stand
Safely ensanctuaried and sing and pray
While others battle—but no man to lead.

CRESPHONTES [*in sudden fury*]. So now at length I see thy naked soul!
Thou art come as ever in old time thou camest
To thwart my purpose and to flout my will.
Thou art the man to lead, and I to follow—
Thou to command, I to obey.

HEPHÆSTION. Enough!
The call of Artis shall not be denied.
All through the long years of thy craven rule
I stood aside and held my peace and watched
Our city slowly from that eminence sink
On whose proud heights our father with strong toil
Raised her and many wars. She is fallen, she lies
Hard on the edge of doom because of thee.
No longer will I stand aside. She called me,
I came to raise her up, and I remain.

CRESPHONTES. Thou fool, dost think I cannot read thy heart,
Cloud it about in phrases as thou wilt?
It was her face that lured thee from the hills,
Her words, because they came from her—Althea.
When last thou tarriedst here I marked thine eyes
Feed on her face with hot desire. . . .

HEPHÆSTION. Thou liest!

CRESPHONTES. She loathed me ever and she burned for thee—
She burned for thy caressing lips and hands,
Until at length she sent for thee, and now——

HEPHÆSTION. Revile me as thou wilt, no whit care I.
But filthy slander spat upon the Queen
I'll not endure.

CRESPHONTES. Then get thee gone!

[*Enter* IPHICLES *and a Warrior.*

IPHICLES. O King,
A herald from the foe craves speech with thee.

CRESPHONTES [*to himself*]. What now? . . .
[*To* IPHICLES] Then bid him enter.

[*Exit the Warrior.*

[*Enter* ALTHEA *down the palace steps.*

IPHICLES. Queen, a herald
Approaches from the rebel lines.

ALTHEA. A herald?
What need for further parley at this hour?
[*Enter* HERALD, *accompanied by several Warriors.*
HERALD [*sees* HEPHÆSTION]. Hephæstion!
HEPHÆSTION. Well, I know thy face, my friend.
Of old thou wast a citizen of Artis.
HERALD [*in a low voice*]. And still had been with thee as King, Hephæstion.
CRESPHONTES [*to the* HERALD]. What is thy will?
HERALD. Cresphontes, from the spears
Leagued and confederate against thy rule
I come, the bearer of pacific words
And fair proposals.
ALTHEA [*scornfully to* HEPHÆSTION]. Even as I thought!
The news hath reached them of thine advent here.
They know that Artis holds at length a man,
Whose strangling hands shall grip the throat of Fate—
And now they fain would slink like beaten hounds
Away——
CRESPHONTES. Be still! This is no time or place
For reckless boasting and the froth of spite.
[*To the* HERALD] Speak on, my friend.
HERALD. King, I am bidden say:
Conquest is not the goal of our resolve,
Nor hate the force that urged us to rebel.
We to the cause of liberty are vowed.
Yet little lust is ours to shed the blood
Of those that are our kindred from of old.
But since it is ordained the strong must rule,
And since we are proven in the lists of war
Stronger than you, we claim by right of strength
Lordship of all the cities 'neath thy sway,
Save Artis, where thou still mayst rule as King
And live in peace.
[*Contemptuous murmurs from the Warriors.*
These are our just demands;
Grant these, and we with all our spears will turn
Homeward in peace before the morrow's sun.
Refuse them, and we'll fight thee to the death.
CRESPHONTES. Now, friend, I praise the gods——
HEPHÆSTION. Oh, praise them not
Ere yet they shower upon thee gifts for praise!
[*Approving murmurs from the Warriors.*
CRESPHONTES [*ominously*]. What mean these words?

HEPHÆSTION. Didst thou not hear this man
Fling down his subtle insult at thy feet?
Shall we endure that those who in the past
Cowered in the shadow of our father's frown
Should dare——

CRESPHONTES. Endure—I'll not endure thy voice
Thrust into councils which concern thee not.

HEPHÆSTION. But speak I will, and thou shalt hear my words.
It was thy listless and reluctant rule
That lured these men into revolt who now
Lie in grim wait before our holy walls.
Behold, they dare with proffer of shameful peace
To come before thee. One reply thou hast,
And only one——

CRESPHONTES. And that reply is mine.
But ere I speak it take these words: The sun
Slopes westward; ere his foot shall touch the sea
I bid thee leave these walls for evermore.
I'll brook no more thy domineering mien,
The hot and venomous hatred of thy heart,
And dark intrigue to undermine my power.
Get hence into the wilds from whence thou camest,
And never show thy face in Artis more.

[ALTHEA *starts forward with a cry, but* HEPHÆSTION *restrains her. The Warriors murmur together.*

HEPHÆSTION. Is this the end?

CRESPHONTES. I have spoken.

HEPHÆSTION. It is well.

ALTHEA [*passionately*]. Cresphontes, art thou mad? And wilt thou slay
The last hope of the city?

CRESPHONTES. I will shield
Artis with my protection and wise love
From ruin.
[*To the* HERALD] Friend, return to those that sent thee,
And say the King accedes to their demands,
And bid them homeward turn their steps in peace.
This tell them, and farewell.

ALTHEA. Cresphontes, not
This final shame!

CRESPHONTES. I have spoken.
[*To the* HERALD] Go thy ways.

HERALD. King, I will take thine answer with great heart
To those that wait without. Farewell. [*Exit.*

ALTHEA [*in a fierce whisper to* HEPHÆSTION]. Then kill him!
HEPHÆSTION [*under his breath*]. Cresphontes?
ALTHEA. Kill him for the city's sake.
[*In a lower voice*] Kill him for mine, beloved.
HEPHÆSTION. I will.
[*To* IPHICLES, *covertly*] Do thou
Detain awhile the Herald at our gates.
Be swift and secret.
IPHICLES. It is well. [*Exit rapidly.*
CRESPHONTES. Althea,
And men of Artis, you that murmur now
At my decision in the teeth of Fate,
I pardon, suffering in my pride with you.
But you will see the wisdom of my choice
In the fair days now dawning on the land.
For is not peace far lovelier than war,
And life than death? We have our city still,
The breeze is ours, the sun and moon and stars
Shine for us, and we are free to go our ways
Unhaunted by the menace of the grave;
In peaceful trust to till the patient fields,
And reap the harvest in unthinking joy.
Praise ye the goddess in your hearts, and I
Will lay my dole of thanks before her feet.
[*He goes slowly back into the temple. A silence.*
ALTHEA. There is one thing to do and only one.
HEPHÆSTION. And I, obedient to thy least command,
Will do it now.
[*To the Warriors*] My friends, I have detained
The Herald at our gates. He must not take
Cresphontes' word unto the rebel chiefs,
If still ye are wedded to the stern resolve
That death is fairer than this shameful peace.
[*They answer him with affirming shouts.*
Then must I do the deed that Fate begat
Far off in the miraculous womb of time.
Straight is the path up which my feet must tread,
And crimson is the close, and out beyond
Darkness.
[*To a Warrior*] Thy sword.
ALTHEA. Upon the altar there
Behold thy father's sword.
HEPHÆSTION. My father's sword!
[*Goes to the altar.*

The sword Cresphontes shamed. [*Takes it.*
'Tis well, my Queen.
Now will I wash with blood that shame away
A Warrior. What wilt thou do?
Hephæstion. The man who was your King
Hath sold the rights of kingship and of man.
He is no longer worthy of the sun,
And he must die.
[*He goes up steps and turns at the door of the temple.*
Keep watch before the door,
And see that no man enter. [*Exit into the temple.*
[*A pause. Then* Althea *utters a sudden cry.*
Althea. Nay, come back!
[*She rushes towards the temple door, but is stopped by the Warriors.*
Hephæstion, pause!
[*Seizing the spears which bar her way*] I charge thee let me pass!
A Warrior. O Queen, no force of thine can hold him now.
Althea [*in a frenzy*]. He must not do this deed or we are doomed!
Make way!
A Warrior. I dare not!
Althea. We are doomed, I say!
Hephæstion, stay thy hand! Hephæstion. . . .
[*She sinks on her knees holding the spears. A pause.* Cleito *enters, faltering down the palace steps.*
Cleito. Althea. . . .
Althea [*in a strangled voice, staggering to her feet*]. I am here. . . .
Cleito. Where is the King?
Althea. Within the temple.
Cleito. Tell me . . . is it true?
Althea [*in a whisper*]. What?
Cleito. That a herald from the rebel lines
Came hither proffering conditions vile
Of peace?
Althea. 'Tis true.
Cleito. True. . . . But they lied who told me—
Ah, say they lied who told me that the King,
My son, embraced that proffer of shameful peace
Betraying the city.
Althea. Nay, thou hast heard the truth.
Cleito [*fiercely*]. I'll not believe it. Lead me to the King.
[Althea *shrinks away from her.* Cleito *feels blindly around.*
Althea, lead me to the King.

ALTHEA [*in a whisper*]. I cannot.
CLEITO. Wherefore? [*A pause.*] Wherefore?
A WARRIOR. Because we have command
To guard the door and see that no one enters.
CLEITO. I am his mother.
A WARRIOR. Even so. [*A cry is heard from the temple.*
ALTHEA. Ah! ah . . .
CLEITO. What sound was that?

[*A shriek sounds from the temple, followed by a man's voice. All stand in rigid suspense.* CLEITO *clutches* ALTHEA'S *arm.*

I charge thee speak. That cry
Rang from the temple. Thou art silent. . . . Ah,
There steals on me a terror of the unknown.
Some dreadful deed is toward. Have mercy, woman!
Give me some little word to ease my soul. . . .
I cannot bear this torture of suspense. . . .
[*A pause; then in a whisper*] Where is Hephæstion?

[*The temple door is flung open and the Chorus files, chanting, on to the stage.*

THE CHORUS

All men for good or ill,
The lowly as the great,
Are vassal to the will
Of unrelenting Fate.
When first we see the light
And draw the living air,
While still we lie in night,
Unborn and unaware,
Fate has prepared the way down which our feet must fare.

[*The Chorus forms, still chanting, a semicircle about the statue, while slowly from the temple two Youths bear the body of* CRESPHONTES. *They lay it at the foot of the altar and cover it with a white cloth.*

THE CHORUS

We have no power to stray
One step to left or right
From that predestined way
Which leads into the night;
And even the gods that bide
In ecstasy unknown,

And hurl the bolt and guide
Through heaven the planets lone,
Must bend them to that will far stronger than their own.

[HEPHÆSTION, *sword in hand, appears at the temple door, while the Chorus continues chanting. He moves slowly to the altar and lays his sword upon it.*

THE CHORUS

But men of shallow soul
And prone to reckless dream
Strive blindly to control
Or move that will supreme.
Some seek to elude the dart,
Some crouch beneath the thong;
But wisdom steels her heart
And makes her spirit strong
To take the worst of blows and bear the bitterest wrong.

HEPHÆSTION. Bring the Herald hither.
CLEITO [*in a whisper*]. Hephæstion. . . .
HEPHÆSTION. Lead my mother away.
ALTHEA [*as though awaking out of a trance*]. O Cleito!
[*She takes* CLEITO's *hand.*
CLEITO. Let go my hand. I will remain. Hephæstion——
HEPHÆSTION. I pray thee, woman, for thine own sake, go.
CLEITO. Wheretofore? [*A pause.*
And who art thou to bid me hence?
I obey the King—him only. Where is he?
HEPHÆSTION [*after a dreadful pause*]. Cresphontes cannot see, nor speak with thee.
ALTHEA. Oh, come away . . . beseech thee, come. . . .
[*She attempts to lead* CLEITO *away, but the latter, wrenching herself free, speaks with intense and tragic passion.*
CLEITO. Now hear,
All ye that stand about me. The high gods,
Shedding upon mine eyes the darkness, shed
Light on my soul. Ere yet Hephæstion came,
I felt his coming and waxed chill with dread,
Knowing he brought with him unhappy dooms
And tragic issues. . . . He is here, and now
Ye cower about some dreadful deed of his,
Seeking with silence from my piercing soul
To guard it—but in vain!

[*Her voice rises to a shriek.*] Ye fools ! stand back!
The thick night on mine eyeballs glimmers red!
I see a horror of red on marble spilt!
And white robes flecked with red!
[*She falters towards the steps.*
The air is dense
With reek of blood——!
[*They watch her for a moment in frozen silence as she staggers on. Then* HEPHÆSTION *draws back as though to hide the body.*

HEPHÆSTION [*hoarsely*]. What wilt thou?
ALTHEA [*with a sudden scream*]. Stop! No step
Further! [*She draws* CLEITO *forcibly back.*
Hephæstion, make an end—an end! . . .
I shall go mad!
[IPHICLES *enters, followed by various Warriors and the* HERALD.

THE HERALD. Hephæstion, what is this?
I have the King's word, final and supreme.
What need of further parley?

HEPHÆSTION. Thou hast heard
Cresphontes, but the word of Artis—no!
I speak for Artis : in my heart the heart
Of all the city beats, and from my lips
Sounds the united will of all her men.
[*He appeals to those assembled.*
Do I speak well? [*He is answered with shouts of assurance.*
Althea, is it well?

ALTHEA. The will of Artis is my will.

HEPHÆSTION. Thou hast heard?
Then unto those without the city take
Our final and immutable reply.
We scorn their proffered peace. With all the might
That still is ours, and all our heart and soul,
We will oppose them in the chance of war;
And without mercy given or mercy craved,
And even to the last breath of the last man here,
We'll fight them to the bitterness of death.
[*A great shout from the assembled Warriors.*

THE HERALD. Oh, yet, bethink thee : three to one are we,
For all thy mightiest men are far away.
Haply they lie in distant battle slain,
Or under the green waves. . . .

HEPHÆSTION. Enough! Not Zeus

May change our fixed, imperious resolve.
Return to those that sent thee. Bid them arm
In haste: for I am as one that holds with sweat
In tightened leash the straining dogs of war.
[*Renewed shouts.*

THE HERALD. I call upon the King——
HEPHÆSTION. He cannot hear thee.
THE HERALD. Take him these words——
HEPHÆSTION. No words of thine can reach him.
THE HERALD. The King——
HEPHÆSTION [*pointing to the body*]. Behold the King. . . .
THE HERALD [*with gesture of awe*]. The King!
CLEITO [*in a voice of appeal*]. Cresphontes. . . .
[*A moment of dead silence. All eyes are turned on* CLEITO. *The* HERALD *looks from her to* HEPHÆSTION *and the* QUEEN.
THE HERALD. To those that sent me will I take thy words.
[*Exit, accompanied by several Warriors.*
CLEITO. Cresphontes . . . [*A pause. Her voice breaks.*
Oh, my son, make answer! I,
Thy mother, I alone am leal to thee.
Oh, speak to me! Say but a little word . . .
I want thy voice . . . Where is he? [*A pause.*
ALTHEA. O Hephæstion,
Speak, for I cannot!
HEPHÆSTION. Mother, he is here;
But thou shalt never hear his voice again.
CLEITO. But thou shalt never hear his voice again. . . .
[*A pause; then with deadly calm*] Where lies his body?
HEPHÆSTION. By the altar.
[CLEITO *starts groping up the steps.* ALTHEA *essays to assist her. She waves her away.*
CLEITO. Nay,
I want no hand of thine to assist me now.
Out of this night into the night to come
Henceforth I grope my dreadful way alone. . . .
[*She gropes her way to the corpse.*
ALTHEA. What have I done? I knew not what I did.
CLEITO [*takes the cloth from the* KING'S *face and feels it*]. This is my son.
[*Dreamily, half to herself*] I have not seen his face
So many years. When last I saw his face
It was the face of youth, with soft, round cheeks . . .
But now it is the face of an old man—

The face of an old man. . . .
Hephæstion.

HEPHÆSTION. Mother?

CLEITO. How came my son to die?

HEPHÆSTION. I slew him.

CLEITO. What is't thou sayest? Ah, no, no, no, no, no!
It cannot be. [*Dazedly*] I heard a voice that spake
Saying, "I slew him," a voice that came from far—
A strange voice which I never heard before. . . .
And yet, I knew not.
[*In passionate grief*] Let me not go mad!
I have endured the darkness many years,
And many blows of Fate have I endured
Unmurmuring. Let me not go mad! Not that. . . .
[*She rocks herself, moaning, to and fro.*
No, no, I must be calm. . . . Who spake but now,
Saying "I slew him"?

HEPHÆSTION. Cleito, it was I,
Thy son, who spake, Hephæstion, I who slew
Cresphontes, with the illustrious sword he shamed,
Our father's sword, and purged it with his blood.

CLEITO [*she has risen to her feet; her voice and demeanour are of solemn and tragic passion*]. Now speak. Will none of you avenge your King? [*A pause.*

A WARRIOR. His death was just. [*Approving murmurs.*

CLEITO. I ask you once again
Will none avenge the King? [*A pause.*
Not one. Hephæstion,
Where is thy father's sword?

HEPHÆSTION. Upon the altar,
At thy right hand.

CLEITO. Come hither.
[HEPHÆSTION *goes up to her.*
Take my hand
And guide it to the sword.
[*He does so, and she takes up the sword from the altar.*
Now, art thou man,
Stand forth and bare thy breast and take from me
The swift and violent death thou gav'st the King.
He must not go to Hades unavenged,
And there is none to avenge him here but me,
His mother. Art thou ready?

IPHICLES [*to a Warrior*]. Lo, he stands
As one entranced and rigid!

*[There is a low murmur and a movement among the Warriors.*
*Althea suddenly springs forward and pulls* Hephæstion *aside.*

Althea. Nay, stand back,
Hephæstion. She is filled with fire divine,
Or madness out of Hell. [*To* Cleito] It was my will
That drave him to this splendid deed of blood.
Mine be the glory, mine the award. On him
The city leans. He must not die. Slay me!
Cleito. Thy fate was long since written on the stars:
Thou art reserved for some tremendous doom.
I could not slay thee if I would. Hephæstion,
Art thou prepared to die?
Hephæstion [*who has recovered his self-possession*]. If so I sinned,
I will accept thy vengeance with great heart.
But ere thou raise the sword that I have cleansed,
Hear me; for tragic were indeed thy lot
If at thy hands I went unto the dead
Because I obeyed the high will of the gods.
Cleito. Speak on.
Hephæstion. And you that see my brother slain,
And these my hands all crimson with his life,
Judge also. Mother, when the tidings reached me
That over Artis, like twin thunderclouds,
Ruin, and worse than ruin, dishonour, gloomed,
I swore to compass her relief or die,
And keep her name untarnished evermore.
I came, and ere I met the King, discerned
No menace of dishonour, for all our men
Clamoured for instant battle and the embrace
Of furious death, and in my heart I said,
"Sunlike at least we'll pass into the night,
Magnificent in dreadful pomp of blood!"
But he that now lies silent at thy feet,
Mother, e'en he that drew upon our walls
Peril, and made our name a scorn in Greece,
He would have quenched with set, intolerant will,
This fiery lust for splendid death, and fain
Had dashed the cup of glory from our lips,
Betraying the city to immortal shame,
And with immortal shame smirching the sword
That dazzled once the eyes of all the world.
Therefore I slew him. [*His voice drops.*
Mother, if any power

Could have withheld my hand, that power was love—
The love I bear for thee, who loved me once,
And ushered me with pangs into the sun.
But for my land a larger love is mine,
And stronger duty to my land I owe—
Therefore I slew him. Though the steel that pierced
His recreant heart pierce also thine, beloved,
I slew him, and again would slay. Now raise
The sword. My breast is bare. If so I sinned,
Strike. I will go with proud, unruffled soul
Out of the beauty and the glow of life.

[*A pause; then* CLEITO *lets the sword drop to the ground.*

CLEITO. I know not if thy deed was foul or fair. . . .
Thy words are fair—but lo! my son is dead—
My son is dead, and I am old and blind. . . .

[*She sinks on the ground and covers the dead face with kisses.*

O lips that once were full of broken words. . . .
O sweet eyes once so young and clear. Dead—dead—
O child, my child! . . .

[*She breaks into bitter weeping, rocking herself to and fro.*

ALTHEA [*pitifully touching her shoulder*]. Cleito——

CLEITO [*shrinking away*]. Nay, touch me not.
Thy hands are also red with holy blood. [*She rises to her feet.*
Take up the body of my son, the King,
And bear him to my chamber; on my couch
Lay him, and leave me with my dead alone.

[*Two men take up the body.*

Hephæstion, if this deed with high intent
Was wrought, thou art from punishment immune.
But if thy hand was false that raised the sword,
And thy heart wicked with unnatural hate,
Then will the gods such vengeance hurl on thee
As once they hurled on Clytemnestra's son,
And men will shudder at thy name.

[*To the men bearing the body*] Lead on.

[*She takes the hand of the dead man and walks slowly out beside him.* HEPHÆSTION, ALTHEA, *and the assembled men follow them silently with their eyes, while the Chorus chant the Death Song.*

SEMI-CHORUS OF WOMEN

Out of the night
Where unborn spirits are
He came into the greenness and the sun;

Into the night
That never knew a star
He goes as all the mighty ones have gone.

SEMI-CHORUS OF MEN

Oh, not for him
The roselight of the morn,
Or song of waves upon the lonely shore!
The fields he loved,
The hills where he was born,
Will never hear his footsteps any more.

CHORUS

Shades among shades,
Down shadow valleys strange
He glides, and lingers by unearthly streams.
And life to him,
And hope and joy and change,
Are vague and far as dreams recalled in dreams.

HEPHÆSTION. I would, in truth, for his own soul's repose
That in the haunted and eternal dark
He may forget his life beneath the sun.
Enough! He is dead. And ye that now are
To live as men, and fight as men, and die
As men should die, give judgment. Are my hands
Clean? Is the shame that dulled my father's sword
Purged from the blade?

[*Affirmative shouts from the Warriors.*

A WARRIOR. Thrice holy is thy hand
That struck the blow, and from this bath of blood
Thrice glorious shines thy father's dreadful sword!

ANOTHER WARRIOR. And we are thine in life and death!

[*Renewed shouts.*

HEPHÆSTION. Althea,
Why dost thou stand with white, averted face?
Am I not clean and guiltless in thine eyes? [*A pause.*
Why art thou silent?

ALTHEA. Bid these men depart,
And I will speak.

HEPHÆSTION [*to the Warriors*]. Go now, and at your posts
Await my speedy coming, and prepare
For mighty ventures ere the dawn, for death
Or triumph.

WARRIORS. We are thine in life and death! [*Exeunt.*

HEPHÆSTION [*to the Chorus*]. And you into the temple, and with prayer
And silver sounds implore the Holy One
For word of guidance now the hour is ripe,
And chance must take our challenge and decide
The fate of Artis.

[*Soft music as the Chorus files into the temple,* HEPHÆSTION *turns to the statue of Artemis.*

O divinely just,
O pitiful and true, forsake us not!
Much have we dared, and more will dare; with thee
Beside us and thy counsel in our hearts,
We would assail the battlements of Fate
Undaunted and defy the lightning.

ALTHEA. Oh,
Be still! How darest thou implore her aid
Whose eyes can pierce the night of human souls?

HEPHÆSTION [*in a strained voice*]. But I have naught to hide; I spread my soul
All unashamed before her virgin eyes.
Do I not know her who have served her long,
And in the hinting midnight read her will?
She will not hold him guilty who hath dared
To shed in such a cause his kindred blood.

ALTHEA. What cause?

HEPHÆSTION [*after a pause*]. What cause?

ALTHEA. I ask thee once again—
What cause?

HEPHÆSTION. The cause of Artis.

ALTHEA. O Hephæstion,
Thyself thou canst deceive, with sounding words,
Others thou canst deceive, but never her.
Others may well forgive thee, but not she
Who is more pure than dewfall in the moon
And holy than the stars.

HEPHÆSTION. Thy speech is strange.
What dark and mystic sin——

ALTHEA. The sin which lit
That dreadful torch that flames across the years,
Troy. O Hephæstion, I am shamed to speak—
But speak I must. Look not upon me! Ah!
Would that my face had never seen the light!
Would that thine eyes had darkened ere they fell

Upon this face that leads thee to thy doom!
Not love of Artis kindled in thy heart
Hatred of him that was the King—not love
Of Artis drove that sword into his breast—
Not love of Artis—but the love of me.

HEPHÆSTION [*stands for a moment staring straight before him, then approaches her and says softly*]. Althea . . .
[*She stands silent with averted face. He speaks with hoarse intensity.*
And was it love of Artis spake
Through thy lips urging me to slay thy husband?
Speak—was it love of Artis? [*Silence.*

ALTHEA. No.

HEPHÆSTION. What then?

ALTHEA. My love for thee.

HEPHÆSTION [*with sudden passion*]. Ah, breathe those words again,
Beloved! [*He seizes her in his arms.*

ALTHEA [*wrenching herself free*]. Touch me not! Thy touch is death!
Between our souls a crimson torrent seethes
That nathless neither you nor I may ford,
And over our heads avenging Fate rolls up
Black thunder-cloud! Hephæstion, we are doomed,
For thou, whose life is dedicate to her
Who is most jealous of the jealous gods,
Hast broken from her cold, immortal arms
To me.

HEPHÆSTION. Althea——

ALTHEA. And thou hast used her city,
The chosen of her love, as cloak to hide
Thy blasphemous desire, and thou hast slain
Thy brother at her white, unsullied shrine,
Because he stood between thy love and me.

HEPHÆSTION. All this is true. What then? I care not, so
I have thy lips. [*Takes her in his arms.*

ALTHEA [*once more repulsing him*]. What! art thou mad? Away!
[*Kneels before the statue.*
O thou who art most just of all the gods,
O Artemis, not his the guilt, but mine!
If thou must be avenged, strike me, not him.
For it was I who lured him from thine arms
And breathed upon the fire of human love
That smouldered in his heart, and it was I
Whose furious love and hatred urged him on
To drench thy feet with awful blood. Lo, then,

I kneel before thee with uncovered breast.
Loosen the string and let thine arrow find
Here in my heart its just and proper home.

HEPHÆSTION. What if indeed she loose that arrow now?
Ah! not before such beauty is mine own.
[*Draws her forcibly up to him.*
Althea!

ALTHEA [*struggling feebly*]. Let me go!

HEPHÆSTION. Never again
Save at the cold unanswerable command
Of Death. I have foregone immortal love
To hold thy mortal loveliness embraced,
And would forego all things that earth can give
And heaven promise.

ALTHEA. I am so afraid . . .
We are compassed round with terrors of the night . . .
Up to this spot where now we stand embraced
Winds a long trail of blood guiding them on,
Those furies out of Hell.

HEPHÆSTION [*crushing her to him*]. Look in my face.
Dost thou not feel my love in all thy being,
And my defending arms about thy form?
And art thou still afraid?

ALTHEA. Ah, love, my love,
Hold me against thee—hold me hard. . . . Ah, kiss me
Full on my lips. . . . [*He kisses her.*
And hast thou loved me long?

HEPHÆSTION. When first we met beside the singing wave,
In the white moon, unconsciously I loved thee,
O human face that I could never reach!

ALTHEA. I loved thee then, and knew my love. He stood,
Who now is dead, between thy lips and mine.
Oh, well I read thy heart and felt thy love
Unspoken in the ardour of thine eyes.

HEPHÆSTION. And love and hatred filled me with unrest
And drove me forth into the beckoning world,
Over the blue hills and across the sea.
And ever on my wanderings fared with me
A face whose beauty seemed not of the earth.
I saw it in the splendour of the noon,
I saw it in the purple dusk of dreams,
And in the sunset ritual of gold,
And in the silver spirit of the dawn,
And on the white and lonely mountain-tops,

And moving like a vapour on the sea
I saw that face . . .

ALTHEA [*whispers*]. The face of Artemis?

HEPHÆSTION. In truth it seemed her face—so white and chaste,
So passing holy and divinely sweet;
And thrilled with adoration unto her
I gave myself, my body and my soul,
To serve her even to the hour of death.
And evermore that face abode with me,
By night and day—and now in lovelier lines
I see it and more perfect beauty.

ALTHEA [*trembling*]. Now—
The face of Artemis?

HEPHÆSTION. Thy face, beloved. . . .
Ah, it was no immortal face I saw,
Nor is it an immortal face I see,
But thine, O sweet and human lips and eyes,
My Queen!

ALTHEA. Then—then 'twas I that haunted thee—
Me—me whom thou didst worship all those years?

HEPHÆSTION. Yea, thy remembered yet forgotten face.
And when I saw thee once again, meseemed
The goddess stood before me in fair flesh.
I trembled, and the past returned.

ALTHEA. Ah, take
And hold me in thine arms for evermore.

HEPHÆSTION. I'll hold thee in my arms against the world.
Fated for one another from of old,
Parted by Fate, and drawn by Fate together,
We stand, and neither man, nor god, nor Fate
Shall part us. For the love I bear for thee
Hath put a rushing fire into my veins,
And thewed me with unconquerable steel:
I was a man, but now I am a god,
And I defy the powers!—

[*The temple door is thrown open and a Priest stands on the threshold.*

THE PRIEST. O Queen Althea,
And thou, Hephæstion, our exceeding peril
Hath moved the great heart of the Holy One,
And to our cry she hath inclined her ear.
For even now one of those virgins three
That knelt in prayer before the inmost shrine
Rose to her feet with mystic rapture thrilled,

And, muttering unintelligible words,
Shuddered into an alabaster calm,
Her wide ecstatic eyes on the unseen
Fixed, and her white breast heaving, and her hair
Blown all about her by unearthly winds.
So stands she waiting on the word divine.
Lo, then, I charge thee call upon her name
Who can alone defeat the imminent doom,
For now at length that dreadful hour is here
Which must decide the fate of all we love. [*Exit.*

[*The Chorus, singing softly, files on to the stage and groups itself in a semicircle about the statue.*

ALTHEA. I tremble, for an end draws nigh.
HEPHÆSTION. What end?
ALTHEA. Our heaven cancelled by the tides of night.
HEPHÆSTION. The starless night were beautiful with thee!
We can but die—and what is death?
ALTHEA. I know not.

CHORUS

O twin-born with the sun, and fair as she
Who rose all flushed from the reluctant sea,
O pure with dew and moonlight purity—
Artemis, hear our prayer!

HEPHÆSTION. Goddess, thy faithful city, thy beloved,
The nursling reared upon thy virgin breast,
Stands now at bay, her back against the night,
Her reckless front opposed to many spears.
She knows not fear; but pauses and awaits
Ere yet she storm the bastioned heights of doom,
Thy word of counsel or thy promised aid.

CHORUS

O brilliant huntress in the glades of night,
And fleeter-footed than the flying light,
And sure of hand and terrible to smite—
Artemis, hear our prayer!

ALTHEA. O thou whom passion never led astray,
Coldly impartial and serenely just,
If any here have erred against thy will,
On them let fall the arrows of thy wrath,
But to the innocent extend thy hand.

CHORUS

To thee the stricken and the helpless creep,
Thou giv'st to those whom life hath wounded deep
A death more delicate than dreamless sleep—
Artemis, hear our prayer!

[*The door of the temple opens, and on the threshold stands one of the three Virgins. Her aspect is wild and menacing. She glides forward.*

VIRGIN. Enough! The Holy One hath heard our prayer.

ALTHEA. Hephæstion, shield me from that woman's eyes,
Fiery with accusing menace!

VIRGIN [*staring ominously at* ALTHEA]. She
Hath spoken her unalterable decree
Into mine ears, and she must be obeyed.

ALTHEA [*staggering back in terror*]. Avert thine eyes!

HEPHÆSTION. Speak and have done
Althea——

ALTHEA [*in a frenzy of fear*]. I cannot bear the horror of that gaze—
I see a sword hovering above my breast—
I feel the solid earth slipping away
From under my feet! The dark——

[*She falls in a swoon to the ground.*

HEPHÆSTION [*bending over* ALTHEA]. She hath swooned away.
Althea . . . she is white and still as death.
[*Fiercely to the* VIRGIN] But me thou canst not wither with thine eyes,
Nor with thy tongue. Speak out!

VIRGIN. I prayed within.
When suddenly upon my soul there swept
Unearthly music from the hills of dream
And alien darkness from beyond the world.
Then a white star rose singing in the gloom,
Grew large, and like a vast and luminous rose,
Unfolding delicate petals one by one,
Disclosed a heart intolerably bright,
And from that brightness, like an odour, breathed
The voice of Artemis, and spake:
"Hephæstion,
Whose life was dedicate to none save me,
Lured by the fair flesh of his brother's wife,
Hath scorned his vow and slain his brother, and sought
To veil his wickedness in patriot love.
Therefore shall Artis sink into the dust,

And all her people to the dead go down,
Unless Hephæstion take his father's sword
And slay Althea as sacrifice to me
Ere the sun disappear into the wave.
Nor shall he leave this precinct where he stands
And join the battle ere this deed be done.
I have spoken."
And the luminous blossom closed
Its petals, dwindled to a star, and sank,
And the great darkness lifted from my soul.

[*Silence.* HEPHÆSTION *stands motionless, staring straight in front of him. Shouting without.* IPHICLES *and several Warriors rush in.*

IPHICLES. Hephæstion, tarry not! Beyond our walls
The broad plain glitters with advancing steel:
The foe have risen, and like a wave they roll
Against us.

[*He perceives* HEPHÆSTION'S *tragic silence and immobility. His voice drops uneasily.*
Take thy father's sword——

[HEPHÆSTION *stands as before. A Warrior touches* IPHICLES' *arm.*

WARRIOR [*in a whisper, pointing to* ALTHEA]. The Queen——

IPHICLES. Is the Queen dead?

[*A Warrior hands* IPHICLES *the sword, which he puts into* HEPHÆSTION'S *hand.*
Come, take thy father's sword——

[HEPHÆSTION *stands immovable and the sword drops out of his hand. They all stare at him in awestruck amazement.*

IPHICLES. What ails thee, lord?

HEPHÆSTION [*rousing himself*]. What ails me? Nothing—I——
What mean'st thou?

IPHICLES. Has the goddess spoken her will?

HEPHÆSTION [*pointing to the* VIRGIN]. Nay, but that woman from her ruined mind
Hath raved delirious fury.

IPHICLES [*pointing to* ALTHEA]. And the Queen?

HEPHÆSTION [*falls on his knees beside* ALTHEA]. Althea! . . . I thank the gods she swooned away
Before that madness smote upon her ears. . . .
White as the dead and very cold . . . Althea. . . .

[*He holds her in his arms and gazes into her face. Then he raises her up and says to one of the Warriors:*

Bear her within and bid the women tend her,
And at her door keep watch.
[*A Warrior takes* ALTHEA *in his arms.*
She must not hear
The slenderest rumour of these frenzied words—
No, not a breath.
[*Clasps* ALTHEA's *hand and gazes into her face.*
Still cold, still cold, my Queen.
Go. . . . [*Exit the Warrior, bearing* ALTHEA.

IPHICLES. And those words, Hephæstion, what were they?

HEPHÆSTION. What meanest thou?

IPHICLES. The words yon Virgin spake.

HEPHÆSTION [*fiercely*]. I'll sully not my lips repeating them.
[*Picks up his sword.*] Come, for the foe await us.

VIRGIN. Iphicles,
Our goddess hath decreed that Artis reel
With all her people back into the dust,
Unless——

HEPHÆSTION. I charge thee hold thy peace and go.
I'll not endure thy speech again.

VIRGIN. Hephæstion,
Beware lest blacker hurricane of wrath
Descend upon thee. That which I have heard
That must I speak for all the world to hear.
Because this man desired his brother's wife
He killed his brother and brake his deathless vows:
Therefore shall ruin rush upon the city
Unless he slay the woman whom he loves
Ere the sun disappear into the sea. [*Consternation.*

A WARRIOR [*in a whisper*]. The Queen?

VIRGIN. The Queen.

IPHICLES [*dully*]. Unless he slay the Queen?

HEPHÆSTION. Was I not right? Long prayer hath wrecked her soul.
Leave her to rave, and follow me. [*He moves off.*

VIRGIN. Hephæstion,
It was decreed thou shouldst not go to battle
Before that awful sacrifice was made.

HEPHÆSTION [*defiantly*]. Ah! who hath force to hold my war-ward feet?
Come!

[*He takes a few steps, then suddenly stops, as though arrested, and staggers back, his face transfixed with terror. He puts his hand over his eyes and stands for a moment breathing hard.*

A Warrior [*in a whisper*]. Is he smitten?
Iphicles. Lord . . . what ails thee? Lord?
[Hephæstion *stands rigid. The Warriors whisper together.*
Hush!
Hephæstion [*in a faint, tremulous voice*]. Iphicles. . . .
Iphicles. I am here.
Hephæstion [*slowly reaching out his hand*]. Give me thy hand.
I stand as in a night without a star . . .
I am afeared. . . . [*Clutches* Iphicles' *hand.*
Thy hand. . . . Ah! hold me fast!
I am all benumbed. . . . Iphicles, something, something
Laid on my heart a viewless clutch of ice.
I could not move—I dared not move——
[*He stands for a moment staring straight in front of him, then suddenly flings* Iphicles *aside.*
Away!
I'll not be stayed by all the gods in heaven!
I'll strangle opposition with these hands!
I'll——
[*He moves determinedly away, and is once again invisibly arrested, and staggers backwards, dropping his sword on to the ground. He stands for a moment rigid, while the Warriors whisper excitedly together.*
[*Shouting without. Two Warriors enter hurriedly.*
A Warrior. Where is he? Hephæstion, come!
Another Warrior. The foe
Have gained that breach they made against the south!
They crushed us backward with resistless spears.
Give us thine arm and tarry not!
[*A pause. He glances around him bewildered and realizes* Hephæstion's *strained posture. His voice changes.*
Hephæstion . . .
Hephæstion [*after a pause, in a dull, weak voice to himself*]. The blood thaws in my veins. I hear my heart
Beating and feel my strength return. The dream
Hath passed away. For dream it was—a dream—
That horror of blind force that held my soul
Captive, and utterly destroyed my will,
Unmanned me quite, and robbed me of my power—
A dream—no more—and now—
[*He seems to pull himself together*
Now must I take my sword—my father's sword—
The sword I cleansed, and go into the fight.

[IPHICLES *picks up the sword*

They called me: they are pressed. I must get hence,
And lead them on. I swore to lead them on
To victory or death . . . my sword . . .

IPHICLES [*handing it to him*]. 'Tis here.

[HEPHÆSTION *takes the sword and stands motionless, staring wildly before him.*

A WARRIOR [*in a whisper*]. What is it?

ANOTHER WARRIOR. He is accursed.

IPHICLES [*touching* HEPHÆSTION'S *arm*]. Hephæstion, speak.

HEPHÆSTION [*in a dead voice*]. Something hath sapped my courage at the source.
My limbs are manacled. I dare not move
Against that viewless barrier again.
I am undone. . . . Leave me alone. . . .

[*He waves them all aside, and half turning towards the temple, perceives the Virgin. He stiffens with sudden fury.*

Ah, thou,
White sorceress, take thine eyes from off my face,
And from my spirit lift these spells of thine!

[*He advances menacingly towards the steps.*

I charge thee break these gyves invisible
That bind me hand and foot. By all the gods,
I will assail thy magic at the heart
And send thy soul into the hideous night
From whence it rose, and free mine own!

[*He makes a sudden rush towards her, but* IPHICLES *and Warriors intervene.*

Stand back!

[*He assails them furiously.*

IPHICLES [*struggling with him*]. Hephæstion, art thou mad?

HEPHÆSTION [*in a frenzy*]. Stand back, I say
See how she smiles on me with hate of hell.
I will obliterate that face! Let go!
Unhand me, or, by Zeus! I'll cut my way
Through flesh and bone to reach her where she stands
Weaving my ruin! [*He struggles madly.*

A WARRIOR. She is holy and pure.

IPHICLES. Lord, I implore thee!

VIRGIN [*hearing her voice,* HEPHÆSTION *ceases to struggle*]. Hearken to my words,
Nor waste thyself in fury on my head.
I am but the passive instrument wherethrough
Artemis breathes her will, and in thy heart,

Hephæstion, well thou knowest I am true
And speak what I have heard. I hate thee not:
Rather I pity thee as the sport of Fate
And Queen Althea, whose beauty lured thee on.
But when the gods speak they must be obeyed.
Resistance is in vain: be thou resigned,
And take the awful punishment decreed.

[*The* VIRGIN *turns and glides slowly back into the temple. A long pause.*

HEPHÆSTION [*unsteadily*]. Why stand you here? The battle calls you. Go!

IPHICLES. And thou, Hephæstion?

HEPHÆSTION [*fiercely*]. What of me? Away!

A WARRIOR. In vain, for now we battle without hope.

HEPHÆSTION [*in sudden fury*]. Thou liest!

[*Springs upon the man and clutches his throat.*

A WARRIOR. Let go . . .

HEPHÆSTION. Unsay those words!

IPHICLES [*restraining* HEPHÆSTION]. My lord!

HEPHÆSTION [*hurling the man off*]. What meant that fellow with his craven lie? [*He glares around him.*

Dream not all strength has withered from mine arm.
Let him that holds the words yon woman spoke
For truth inspired by Artemis stand forth—
I'll prove him liar with my naked hands,
And tear his body and soul asunder.

IPHICLES [*after a silence*]. Lord,
I know the holy Virgin's words were true.

HEPHÆSTION. Iphicles, thou!

IPHICLES. Alas, my lord, alas!
Why should we blind our eyes against the truth,
Or fly the thing we never can escape?
I know with heavy heart, and thou—nay, hear me—
Thou knowest as surely that our doom is sealed:
That Artis and her people are condemned
Unless thou slay the Queen.

HEPHÆSTION. What then?

IPHICLES. I know not:
I am thy servant and obey thy will.

HEPHÆSTION. 'Tis well. Then take my will and get thee gone.
Even were that woman's frenzy high inspired
By the unsparing purpose of the gods
And urged by all the tyranny of Fate,
I would oppose it to the latest breath,

And final ebb of power to grasp my sword.
And had each man of Artis myriad lives,
And every life were an agony to lose,
And all were lost unless I slew the Queen—
Then should the Queen live and those others die,
Woman and man and child. Are ye content? [*A silence.*
Then get ye gone. [IPHICLES *and Warriors move off.*

IPHICLES [*turning with an imploring gesture*]. Hephæstion, hear me——

HEPHÆSTION. Go!

[*Exeunt all save* HEPHÆSTION *and Chorus.*

CHORUS

[*While* HEPHÆSTION *stands motionless, staring straight before him.*

Not in slow decay
And retreating light
Let me go my way
Back into the night,
But in flare and fury of unyielding fight.

Let not weeping eyes
Be the last I see,
Sorrow-laden sighs
Close the ears of me:
These for slaves and women: I am man and free.

Lo, in glittering pride
And with eyes aglow,
As unto a bride
Singing as they go
Down upon us wavelike roll the splendid foe.

And the blaze and sound
Turn my soul to fire,
And my pulses bound
With supreme desire,
Valour Heraclean, strength that cannot tire.

Force has met with force,
Steel encountered steel:
Hero, man and horse
Crash and sway and reel . . .
Never singer chanted half the joy I feel.

This is life: to keep
Steadfast to the light.

This is death: to leap
From the topmost height
Of ecstatic being straight into the night.

HEPHÆSTION [*passionately*]. Enough! Why torture me with songs of battle,
Who am denied the privilege of death?

ONE OF THE CHORUS. There is naught left to pray for but that death
Come as the lightning comes and linger not.

HEPHÆSTION. Leave me alone.

ONE OF THE CHORUS [*as the others file into the temple*]. Look westward, lord: the sun
Sheds a long path of gold across the sea.

[*The sunlight deepens in colour until the close of the Act.*

[*Exit the Chorus into the temple.*

[*A pause. Then* HEPHÆSTION, *gazing westward, cries out with tragic passion:*

HEPHÆSTION. Oh, stay thy coursers but a little while!
For bound, O Helios, to thy golden car
Roll to the water more tremendous dooms
Than ever threatened man since Troy went down
Palled in funereal smoke.
[*He turns.*] I am alone. . . .
Have I the fortitude to face the truth
And look avenging Fate between the eyes?
I am alone.
[*A note of fear creeps into his voice.*] Am I alone?
[*In sudden terror*] There stands
One in the sunlight whom I cannot see.
She binds my feet, she robs me of my power,
She reads with smiling cruelty my heart
Writ large with helpless passion and despair.
She moves upon me like a wind of night
Blowing from hills of ice . . . I feel her breath
Upon my face . . . Artemis . . . Artemis. . . .
[*He gradually pulls himself together.*] No!
Why should I fear who never feared before?
I will stand up and take my doom with pride,
And go with all my people to the dead,
Conquered and yet unbroken to the end.
Yea, Artemis, and mercy from thy hands
Would I reject because it came from thee,
Who art most callous of the callous gods,

And cruellest, being cold as moonlight.
[CLEITO *slowly descends the palace steps led by a girl.*
Ah,
Mother, thou com'st in favourable hour
To flaunt thy triumph and to mock thy son.

CLEITO. I triumph not, nor mock thee in thy fall.
Justice I asked and justice I received.
The gods have paid thee justly for thy crime.
Where is Althea?

HEPHÆSTION. She hath swooned away
And lies within her chamber.

CLEITO. Then she heard
Thy sentence?

HEPHÆSTION Nay, she swooned ere it was spoken.

CLEITO [*in a voice of intense hatred*]. Let her not die unconscious of her doom:
She must return to life before the end,
And realize the sweetness of the sun,
And all the horror which her face hath wrought,
And all the loathing of the immortal gods,
And all the hatred that she leaves behind.

HEPHÆSTION. Be still! I'll not endure thy inhuman tongue!
Old woman, let thy bloody fancies brood
On Artis fallen and her people dead,
Not on Althea sacrificed by me.
I would not slay her for a thousand cities,
Nor at the mandate of a thousand gods.

CLEITO. Would not! Thou fool! Dost pit thy human will
'Gainst the unconquerable will of Fate?
Kill her thou must, for so it was ordained
Before thine eyelids opened on the sun.

HEPHÆSTION. What meanest thou?

CLEITO. Long since in dream I saw
Althea dead, and she was slain by thee.

HEPHÆSTION. I care not for thy dreams.

CLEITO [*touching his arm and in a changed voice*]. Hephæstion,
I have borne two sons, and one of them is not,
And one still lives, and though his hands are red
With a deed fiercer than Orestes wrought,
And though on him the fury of the gods
Sweeps like a storm, his destiny is still
Magnificent with glory far away.
Up then, and linger not! Thy path is clear,
The atoning sacrifice awaits thy hand,

With victory for us and peace for thee.

[*A pause.* HEPHÆSTION *stands motionless.*

Where stands the sun?

ATTENDANT. It reddens toward the sea.

CLEITO. Then must this deed be done and on the instant.
Hephæstion, answer me. . . . Hephæstion!

[*A pause. He stands motionless.*

Hephæstion, art thou turned to stone?

HEPHÆSTION. Alas!
Would I were stone, and not this flesh and blood
That burns and shudders in the cruel gin
Which those high powers whose sport is human pain
Cunningly baited for mine overthrow . . .
To quench the love-light in thine eyes, my Queen,
And the love-murmur on thy lips—no—no!—
It cannot be—it shall not be!
[*Flinging off* CLEITO'S *hand*] Away!
Thy murderous tongue would lure me from the path
Which I resolve unfalteringly to tread.
If naught but this foul sacrifice can save
Artis from ruin, then let Artis go
The way of Troy, and—— [*Distant shouting from without.*
Ah!

CLEITO. Be still and hark!

[*The shouting grows louder.*

Those sounds approach. I hear the wail of women,
The cry of children . . .
[*Her voice sharp with fear*] Ah, the streets run blood!
The towers are wrapt in unremorseful fire!
Is it too late? Hephæstion, tell me quick—
Is the sun's foot upon the sea?

HEPHÆSTION. Not yet.

CLEITO. Then fetch the Queen. I charge thee fetch the Queen!
Where is thy father's sword? Why lingerest thou?
Hast thou no ears? [*The cries grow louder.*
Ah, ah, those cries again . . .
The mortal agony of helpless souls. . . .
Save them! [*She falls on her knees, clutching hold of* HEPHÆSTION.
Hephæstion, crimson are thy hands
With blood of one: wilt thou drown thyself in blood
Of thousands?

HEPHÆSTION [*pushing her away*]. Were it millions, they must die.
I will not slay the Queen.

[*He moves away from her to the palace steps.*

*[With tumult and cries a crowd composed of women, old men, and children, held with difficulty in check by several Warriors, press on to the stage.*

A Warrior [*pushing back some women*]. Stand back!

A Woman [*screaming to those behind*]. He is here!

[*Tumult and cries of "Hephæstion!"*

Another Woman. Where is the Queen? [*Cries of "The Queen!"*

The sun is low in the west.

A Warrior. Silence! Ye do but hurt your urgent cause
With such unbridled passion.

An Old Man. Let me speak!

An Old Woman. Hephæstion, lo, my daughter is with child
And slowly starves . . .

A Woman. My little son is dead—
Slain by the pestilence——

Another Woman. Where is Althea?

Another Woman. We perish by degrees.

Another Woman. The end is near.

Another Woman. We trust in thee; we pray to thee; Hephæstion,
On thee, and thee alone, depend our lives—
Save us! [*They fall on their knees, wailing.*

Others. Oh, save us! Save us!

A Warrior [*commanding silence*]. Let me speak.
Hephæstion, scant the time for eloquence,
And scant the need. This crouching people here
Is eloquence enough. We are no more,
Save for the intervention of thy hand.
Through that wide breach they made against the south
The rebel spears have driven a furious path.
With sweat and agony we hold them back
In the open street. Thou only canst avert
The crash of doom as Artemis decreed. [*A pause.*

A Woman. Oh, save us!

Another Woman. Oh, have mercy on thy people!

Hephæstion. I can do nothing.

A Warrior. Is Althea alive?

Hephæstion [*harshly*]. Let not the Queen's name pass thy lips again
It seems the craven spirit that I quenched
Hath passed to you. Cresphontes is no more;
But ye would purchase liberty and life
With woman's blood in dreadful anguish spilt.
Has courage wholly withered from your heart
And the heroic manhood of old time?
Shame on you!

CLEITO. Nay, Hephæstion, shame on thee!
People of Artis, look upon this man.
His lust it is delivers you to death—
His and the woman's whom they call the Queen.
He, and he only, can avert your doom,
And yet he will not. Woman, man, and child,
The innocent, the noble, and the weak,
Perish to save a guilty wanton's life.
This is your hero, this, alas, my son!
[*Murmurs that swell into execrations.*

A WOMAN [*screaming above the din*]. But can no force of ours compel his hand?
Say, are you men, and will you stand aside
And indolently watch this fellow fling
Our wives and children to the sword? [*The uproar increases.*

CLEITO. Men? Men?
These are no men. The only men we had
Sailed forth long since to war and now are dead.
[*Furious execrations from the Women. The Warriors stand undecided.*

A WARRIOR. Silence! Hephæstion, we must have the Queen,
And she must die as Artemis decreed.
We can no longer hold the rebels back.
It is one guilty life for many lives.
Give us the Queen.

WOMEN AND WARRIORS. The Queen! The Queen!
[*They surge towards the palace steps.*

HEPHÆSTION [*drawing his sword*]. Stand back!
No mortal power hath force to make me yield.
Ye shall not have the Queen! . . .
[*They press forward with cries of fury.*
Stand back, I say!
That man is dead who dares to advance a step
Further.

A WARRIOR. Enough! Seize him, but slay him not
Or we are lost. The Queen!
[*They make a rush upon him and drag him to the temple steps, when he hurls them off.*

HEPHÆSTION [*pointing his sword to his throat*]. Now hear me. If another man step forth
To assail me where I stand, this sword shall draw
My life's blood and annihilate your hopes.
A dead man cannot sacrifice the Queen.

[ALTHEA *appears on the palace steps. She stands for a moment staring wildly at* HEPHÆSTION.

ALTHEA [*with a scream*]. Hephæstion!

HEPHÆSTION [*with a start, turning*]. Ah!

WARRIORS *and* WOMEN [*in whispers*]. The Queen!

ALTHEA. Put up thy sword.

[HEPHÆSTION *sheathes his sword.* ALTHEA *descends to him and touches his hand fearfully.*

Thy hands are flesh and blood. I am awake,
Not erring, as I hoped, in evil dreams.
[*To the people assembled*] But who are ye? I know you not. . . .
Hephæstion,
What meant that dreadful vision of thyself
Standing upon the sudden edge of death?
[HEPHÆSTION *is silent.*
Ah, am I mad? . . . Whence come these lowering faces?
Are you not men and women of our city?
What awful thing hath happened since I passed
Swooning into the darkness?

CLEITO. Hear my words——

HEPHÆSTION. I charge thee hold thy peace.
[*To* ALTHEA] Beloved, go—
I pray thee go.

CLEITO. And I command thee stay
And take thy doom.

HEPHÆSTION. Be still! [*The crowd murmurs.*

ALTHEA [*touching* CLEITO's *arm*]. Cleito, speak on.

CLEITO [*shaking her off*]. Because thou hast urged my son to break his vow
And slay the King, his brother, for thy sake,
Artemis, in her loathing of thy lust
And of thy blasphemy and murderous hate,
Hath doomed this city and all that dwell therein
To ruin and death unless Hephæstion slay thee
As sacrifice before the sun go down.

[*A long silence. The Queen turns slowly to* HEPHÆSTION.

ALTHEA. Hephæstion . . .

HEPHÆSTION. Queen.

ALTHEA. The words thy mother spake—
Are they the truth? [*He is silent.*
Answer me.

HEPHÆSTION. They are true.

[*A pause.* ALTHEA *looks towards the sinking sun, then turns to* HEPHÆSTION.

ALTHEA. Before the sun go down? The sun is low . . .
Hephæstion, we have little time for speech.
Where must I die?

HEPHÆSTION. Althea, art thou mad?
What are to me the words of Artemis,
And what to me the city and this people?—
Nothing! [*Murmurs from the crowd.*
I care for nothing in all the world,
Save only thee. Thou art the air I breathe,
My food and drink, my sun and moon and stars,
My one divinity and sole desire! . . .
[*The crowd break forth into execrations. He glares at them and suddenly catches her to him. She stands passively in his embrace.*
We stand alone; but such a love as ours—
Stronger than hatred, stronger than the gods,
Stronger than Fate——

CLEITO. And yet so pitiful,
It were a waste of scorn to brand thy love—
Love that inspired thy hand to assault and slay
A man unarmed, and glory in thy deed—
Love that so strangles all nobility
And pity in thee and manhood once thine own,
Thou wouldst condemn the innocent and weak——

ALTHEA [*freeing herself from* HEPHÆSTION]. Be still! As Artemis hath singled me,
And justly, for the atoning sacrifice,
Mine be the final and deciding word.
Hephæstion, if thou hesitate to obey
The voice of Artemis, thy love is vile,
Vile as thy mother's fury brands it, vile
As love men waste upon a wanton. . . . Speak,
Wilt thou obey the voice of Artemis?

HEPHÆSTION [*in a whisper*]. And slay thee?

ALTHEA. Even so.

HEPHÆSTION. Slay thee. . . . I cannot.
I have not heard aright. . . .
Althea, listen.
The Virgin, fired by some delirious hate,
Lied, for I saw it in her face—she lied.
Thy death would naught avail to save the city.
Hear me——

A WOMAN. 'Tis he that lies.
[*The crowd surges forward with execrations.*

ANOTHER WOMAN. Believe him not.

CLEITO. Peace! For she cannot now escape her doom!
They are both tangled in the web of Fate.
Living I saw her not; I have seen her dead. . . .
She's dead already.

ALTHEA. Bring the Virgin hither.

[*A Warrior starts to obey.* HEPHÆSTION *stops him*

HEPHÆSTION [*in terror*]. Nay, for I cannot bear her face again,
Nor hear that voice denouncing judgment. . . . Queen,
Grant me a little time—a little time . . .

ALTHEA. I have no time to grant. The sun is low.

HEPHÆSTION [*wildly*]. Then I implore thy mercy, I am broken,
Cornered and beaten to my knees. . . . Althea,
Had I the strength to crush the god of war,
I could not slay thee even if I would. . . .
This arm would wither ere it raised the sword.

[*Falling on his knees, his voice breaking with passion a*
*despair.*

Hear me and pity me, and, ye people, pity me
And show a little mercy. Slay me here—
Slay me. I long for death with all my soul.
But drive my sword into the heart I love—
I cannot. [*He raises imploring hands to the statue*
Goddess, I have served thee long,
And worshipped thee among the lonely hills,
And honoured thee with sacrificial hands—
Wilt thou requite thy votary so ill,
Thrusting a deathless horror on his soul
And blasting him to all eternity?
I crave not thy forgiveness. All I crave
Is death, in any agony thou wilt.
But not this vengeance . . . pity me——

[*He covers his face with his hands*

ALTHEA [*going to him and touching his shoulder*]. Hephæstion.

[*He looks up*

Beloved, rise and take my hand in thine, [*He rises to his feet*
And hear my words.
Death that men greatly fear
Is often fairer than the life they love,
And such a death has Fate reserved for me.
I die that all may live that call me Queen—
All whom I love and love me, and I take
This splendid death at his beloved hands
Whom most I love in all the world.

HEPHÆSTION [*brokenly*]. But ah,
To go out of the warmth into the cold . . .
Out of the holy sunlight to the dark . . .
Out of mine arms. . . .

ALTHEA [*dreamily*]. Yes, in the place of souls
I shall not see the sunlight any more. . . .
[*Pause. She speaks with passionate ardour.*
To go out of thine arms! Oh this, beloved,
This is the final glory of my death:
That ere the years and memory and the world
Had cooled the burning beauty of our love,
We should go straight apart for evermore—
Now, now when all thy being thrills to me,
And all I am is passionately thine!
[*She clasps him round the neck.*
Friend, had I lived the irrevocable past,
The dead past that can never wholly die,
Would have numbed our hearts with its funereal breath
And filled our souls with memories best forgot.
We might have loved each other to the end,
But never again with such a love as now.
We might have grown to loathe what now we love.
But where I go is neither love nor hate,
And from the soul all memory dies away.

HEPHÆSTION. Queen, I am broken, I am without strength;
But thou art strong, and I must do thy will. . . .
[*She draws his head to her and kisses his forehead.*

ALTHEA [*turning to the people*]. And you, beloved people of my city,
Take from my lips an ultimate farewell.
Unwillingly I leave the light behind,
Yet am I happy, knowing that my death
Will bring divine salvation to the land.
And this I pray you. In the days to be,
And though all memories wither from my soul
And in the darkness I forget the sun,
Forget not me, but think of me as one
Who greatly sinned because she greatly loved,
Who gladly bore the vengeance of her sin,
And went the strait and bitter way of death
Unfalteringly and as a queen should go.
Farewell! [*The people bow their heads in silence.*
Cleito, farewell!

CLEITO. Farewell!

ALTHEA [*as the Chorus files out of the temple*]. Beloved,

Come, for the sun's rim rests upon the sea,
And the night calls my spirit from afar.

[*The Chorus form about the statue, and* ALTHEA *and* HEPHÆSTION *pass slowly into the temple.*

CHORUS

Disimpassioned Queen of Darkness, lo, to thee there cometh one,
Fairer never trod the meadows or delighted in the sun,
And for her the joy of living and of love had just begun.

But the joy she puts behind her, and the love she waves aside,
And with steadfast feet unfaltering, proudly and unterrified,
Goes where love can never enter, and no happiness abide.

Disimpassioned Queen of Darkness, turn on her benignant eyes.
If she sinned, her sin is cancelled by this radiant sacrifice.
Let her deeply drink of Lethe and forget the morning skies,

And forget her white-walled city, and forget her lordly race,
Dragged from long-established glory down to imminent disgrace,
And forget her lover's kisses, and forget her lover's face.

[*From far comes the distant sound of shouting. It grows rapidly nearer and louder.*

A WARRIOR. Hark!
A WOMAN. They are here!
[*As the sound swells in volume the crowd become more and more fevered and terrified.*
ANOTHER WOMAN. It is the foe!
ANOTHER WOMAN. We are lost!
A WARRIOR. Althea dies in vain!
ANOTHER WARRIOR. Come, let us die,
Our faces 'gainst the foe unto the last!
[*The shouting grows louder. The Women surge shrieking to the statue and fall in supplication before it. All the Warriors rush out to battle.*
A WOMAN. Goddess, have mercy on the innocent!
That which we could we've done to assuage thy wrath.
ANOTHER WOMAN. Have pity on us! Save our lives at least!
ANOTHER WOMAN. Our children's lives.
AN OLD MAN. We sacrificed the Queen.
[*The noise grows deafening. The Women huddle shrieking together.*
They come! O Artemis, let death be swift. . . .

[*A Warrior rushes in.*

THE WARRIOR. Stand up and shout, for we are saved!
WOMEN. Saved! Saved!

[*Hysterical weeping and cries of joy.*

AN OLD MAN. What miracle hath happened?

[*Other Warriors rush in shouting.*

A WOMAN. We are saved!
AN OLD MAN. Are the foe beaten from our walls?
A WARRIOR. They fly:
They have seen our galleys sweeping from the north,
Their sails full-bellied with miraculous winds.
WOMEN. Our galleys?
OTHERS. Speak. . . .
OTHERS. Our vanished army?
A WARRIOR. Yea,
Praise ye the gods; our long-lost ships are here!

[IPHICLES *enters.*

IPHICLES [*commanding silence*]. People of Artis, from the jaws of death
We have been magically snatched away.
For even as our ultimate defence
Bent to the breaking-point before the might
Of overwhelming odds and furious hate,
We felt a sudden slackening in the assault,
And the victorious faces of our foes
Wavered and blanched. A panic-striking word
Swept like a wind across the rebel lines,
And from our seaward-facing walls a cry
Triumphant rang: "Our ships, our ships return!"
And so it was. For round the northern cape,
Swept the proud fleet that we imagined lost;
And the foe brake and fled, and even now
Our warriors set their feet upon the land.
Soon shall their fury drench the hills with blood,
And we shall be avenged, and we shall stand,
Artis shall stand where once she stood of old,
Our holy city feared of all the world
And favoured of the gods!

[*With shouts of triumph and hysterical cries of joy the people surge about the temple steps. Suddenly the great doors of the temple fall apart and* HEPHÆSTION *appears on the threshold. Perceiving him, the people*

*fall gradually silent. He moves slowly down the steps to the altar and they shrink away, so awful is the tragedy of his face. He lays his sword upon the altar.*

HEPHÆSTION. The Queen is dead. . . .

[*A silence*

CHORUS

Inscrutable are they
That wield supernal power:
From depths of dark decay
They rear the splendid flower;
On waste and fruitful soil
They spend the sun and rain;
They lavish to despoil,
And wreck to raise again.

# THE WALLS OF JERICHO

## By ALFRED SUTRO

*First produced at the Garrick Theatre, London, October 31, 1904*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

| | |
|---|---|
| Jack Frobisher | Simpson |
| Hankey Bannister | Footmen |
| The Marquis of Steventon | Lady Westerby, *Dallas' sister* |
| Lord Drayton | Miss Mornington |
| Harry Dallas | The Duchess of Skye |
| Bertram Hannaford | Lady Parchester |
| The Hon. Wilfred Renton | Miss Wyatt |
| Lord Marchmont | Mary |
| The Hon. Jasper Twelvetrees | Lady Lucy Derenham |
| Peters | Lady Alethea Frobisher |

THE description "artificial comedy" has been applied to the theatre of Mr Alfred Sutro; justly applied, if it is first remembered that all comedy, even the most apparently naturalistic, is tificial in the sense that playwrights use artifice in the selection and rangement of their material. Mr Sutro's characters, with rare exceptons, have addresses in Mayfair. In *The Walls of Jericho* the insinrities of Mayfair are dramatically exploded by a downrighter from own Under. In other plays outsiders may or may not break in on the charmed circle, but there is always, beneath the decorative logue, a rich vein of sane humanity. *The Two Virtues* (1914) is particularly delightful instance of the conflict between truth and nventionality.

Professor Allardyce Nicoll says of Mr Sutro: "He has written some enty two plays. Among his literary and popular triumphs must be mbered *The Walls of Jericho* (1904) and *The Choice* (1919). Without lizing colloquialism and dialect he has succeeded in giving a lifelike ect to a dialogue which is truly brilliant."

As a typical brief example of Mr Sutro's wit, *The Spectator* quotes

the following from *A Marriage has been Arranged*, which is included in the Second Series of *One-Act Plays of To-day*:

> CROCKSTEAD. . . . But it is a strange thing that I am always called Harrison, and that no one ever adopts the diminutive.
>
> ALINE. That does not surprise me: we have no pet name for the east wind.

# ACT I

*An anteroom in the* MARQUIS OF STEVENTON'S *house in Mayfair. A ball is in progress, and there are the usual surroundings pertaining to such functions. A dance has just ended, and some of the guests have come into the room. There is* LADY PARCHESTER, *a somewhat mature but still handsome dame,* MISS WYATT, *a frolicsome American girl,* TINY MORNINGTON, *an attractive but somewhat tired-looking woman in the early thirties.* MR TWELVETREES, MR HANNAFORD, *and* LORD MARCHMONT *are among the men. Of the three,* MR HANNAFORD *is the only one who differs at all from the ordinary type of well-set-up young Briton to be met at parties.* MR HANNAFORD *fancies himself to be a wit, and is under the pleasant delusion that he sparkles; he has a monocle irrevocably fixed in his eye, and wears the cynical expression that he feels to be essential for a blasé man about town.*

HANNAFORD [*leaving* LADY PARCHESTER *and bowing low before* MISS WYATT]. Miss Wyatt, my homage at your feet. After seeing you dance, I at last understand the meaning of the word 'Evolution'!

TINY [*fanning herself*]. That's a doubtful compliment to Miss Wyatt. Mr Twelvetrees should resent it.

TWELVETREES [*puzzled*]. Why? I don't see——

TINY. Mr Hannaford implies that Miss Wyatt had a monkey at the other end.

MISS WYATT. Oh!

HANNAFORD. Miss Wyatt, our friend Miss Mornington corrupts my text. The dictionary meaning of the word 'evolution' is "the appearance, in orderly succession, of a long train of events." You supplied the long train, and we breathlessly beheld——

LADY PARCHESTER. Oh!

HANNAFORD. —the events.

TINY [*to* LADY PARCHESTER]. Yes—white and pink.

MISS WYATT. Oh, Lady Parchester, what *does* he mean? I guess it's something unkind.

TWELVETREES. Don't be alarmed, Miss Wyatt: Mr Hannaford's utterances have no meaning; he's satisfied if they sound clever.

MISS WYATT [*moving to* HANNAFORD]. A little too clever for me. Do you ever come off that fence, Mr Hannaford?

HANNAFORD. Dear Queen, why not climb up? There's room enough for two!

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Miss Wyatt. Thanks—I don't like sitting on spikes! Say, who's the melancholy Jacques over there, talking to our hostess?

Hannaford. Oh, that's our son-in-law, Frobisher. Don't you know him?

Twelvetrees.

> "Millionaire, married to marquis's daughter,
> Can't dance, so he's taken to whisky-and-water!"

Hannaford. Oh, I'll cap that.

> "Millionaire, married to daughter who's frisky,
> Driven by Dallas to soda-and-whisky!"

Lady Parchester [*to* Tiny]. And they say *we* talk scandal!

Tiny. Dogs *will* bay at the moon!

Marchmont [*interrupting*]. Miss Wyatt, I beg that you will not allow your candid American mind to be clouded by these base detractors.

Hannaford [*to* Twelvetrees]. Enter virtue on a giraffe!

Marchmont. In the first place Frobisher doesn't drink; in the second his wife isn't frisky, Dallas being merely an amiable person, a friend—with whom she flirts, as I dare venture to suppose they even flirt in America.

Tiny [*to* Lord Marchmont]. Lord Marchmont, I forgive you your revoke last night!

Hannaford. Marchmont has the crystal ignorance of the hereditary legislator. He discusses improved sanitation, sewage-farms, and similar airy trifles. He's an amateur philanthropist, like Frobisher——

Twelvetrees. Who is now gloomily approaching!

[Jack Frobisher *has come into the room. He is a big, heavy sort of man, tremendously out of place in a ballroom, and conscious of being out of place. He has a first-class tailor, and his tailor has taken infinite trouble, but* Jack's *clothes don't fit quite so well as the other men's—they wrinkle where they shouldn't. That is probably because he slouches too much; he certainly does slouch. He is good-looking in a heavy sort of way; he has a frank, open face, and the eyes of a man used to living in wide spaces. He is a misfit in ballrooms; and is rather unhappily conscious of being a misfit.*

Hannaford. Frobisher and he both sob over the working classes, and howl for millenniums. [*He points to* Jack.] Oh, look at him! Isn't he happy? He sees the writing on the wall. Add Hamlet to General Booth and flavour with Tolstoy—you have our son-in-law!

Tiny. Add Punch to his dog Toby, and cook in vinegar—you have Mr Hannaford!

HANNAFORD. Thank you, dear bishop's daughter! Add you to me, and we have——

TINY. Titania and Bottom! How are you, Mr Frobisher?

[*They shake hands.* TINY *and* LADY PARCHESTER *go off.*

HANNAFORD. Ah, Frobisher! Let me introduce you to Miss Wyatt. Miss Wyatt is the most glorious exponent of the mystic measure known as the cake-walk. Do you dance it?

JACK. I'm afraid it's not quite in my line.

[*He goes to the fireplace: the music begins again.*

HANNAFORD. Miss Wyatt, shall I conduct you to the scene of your next triumph?

MISS WYATT. Let me remember who my partner is! Yes, please.

[*They move off.*

[MARCHMONT *saunters up to* JACK.

MARCHMONT. Bored, Frobisher, eh?

JACK. Rather. And you?

MARCHMONT. Oh, I'm used to it. I shall slip off very soon, and go to the club. Come?

JACK. My wife's here.

MARCHMONT. Of course—I forgot. By the way, I'm afraid we shall want some more money for those model dwellings of ours.

JACK. Not from me. We've sunk too much already—we're being robbed right and left.

MARCHMONT. Oh, one always is robbed, you know. But it's very good work——

JACK. It would be, if we looked after it ourselves.

MARCHMONT. My dear chap, what can we do? Live there, and keep the books? Have you tried living in Stepney?

JACK. Well, I've not spent all my life in Mayfair.

MARCHMONT. Don't be extreme, Frobisher!

JACK. That's always the cry. . . . Oh, no, I won't be extreme—but not another penny from me till a proper use is made of the money, and it goes into the pockets of the poor devils who need it!

[JACK *gets up and paces the room;* MARCHMONT *shrugs his shoulders; the* MARQUIS *and* LUCY *come in from the ball-room. The* MARQUIS *is round and chubby, with a great deal of red face and silver hair. He is in the early sixties, but looks rather more. The* MARQUIS *has undoubtedly an air; he is a personage; and his manners are exquisite.* LADY LUCY *is twenty-one or twenty-two, and deliciously pretty. She might almost have stepped out of a Romney canvas; she has the complexion, the smile, of the women Romney was so fond of painting.*

JACK. Why, Lucy, not dancing?

LUCY [*with a pout*]. I was engaged to Lord Marchmont——

MARCHMONT [*going to her*]. Oh, Lady Lucy, a thousand apologies! Frobisher and I were discussing our model dwellings. Will you forgive me?

LUCY. Yes, but come quick! It's the loveliest waltz, and half over already!

[MARCHMONT *offers his arm, and they go into the ballroom together.*

MARQUIS. Model dwellings, eh? Homes for the pampered poor? Humanity, humanitomtity, as somebody calls it!

JACK. We take our pleasures one way or another. Mine at least are harmless.

MARQUIS. H'm—well—the word possesses also an invidious sense, as implying a certain *naïveté*. . . . I confess I am sorry to see you invading the domain of the dowager and the parson. However, each man to his folly—— Tell me, do you know Hankey Bannister?

JACK. I've heard of him, of course—I may have met him.

MARQUIS. They say his mine is one of the richest in the world. He is a man worth cultivating. Lady Westerby has promised to bring him here to-night. And, by the way, you have a prejudice against that estimable lady——

JACK. I hardly know her.

MARQUIS [*chuckling*]. There was a little episode in her youth, of course—but when a wealthy banker marries a—damsel—he provides her, as it were, with a new passbook, eh?

JACK. My objection is to her brother.

MARQUIS. Dallas? A most agreeable person. Alethea is dancing with him now; it was she who told us to ask him.

JACK. Yes. He is a friend of hers—he amuses her, I suppose.

MARQUIS. And it was for that very reason that Dallases were created—to amuse our women. Failing that, they turn to religion. My lady wife has turned to religion. You don't want Alethea to become like her mother?

JACK [*with a smile*]. Well . . .

MARQUIS. An awkward question, I admit, to put to a gallant man. Let us see, now—I wonder what the correct answer would be? There's the pedantic reply, of course—but that *is* pedantic. One would have to be charming, without being flowery, and compliment *both* ladies. Now, I wonder——

JACK. The man is a foolish, vapid creature.

MARQUIS. Dallas? So much the better. The sensible husband rejoices when his wife selects a foolish Dallas to flirt with.

JACK. That is unfortunately not my point of view.

MARQUIS. *Make* it your point of view, my dear fellow, or, what is

even better, have no point of view at all. The age we live in is an elastic age; we must all be elastic to-day. Heaven, if I chose to worry! Has Alethea told you about Max?

JACK. Yes.

MARQUIS. Think of it, the young rascal! His own sister's companion. My wife has very properly packed the little lady off at once.

JACK. What will become of her?

MARQUIS. That is scarcely my concern. The girl is pretty, and the world is big.

JACK. Admirably put, but——

MARQUIS. There is no 'but'; it *is* admirable. Admire, and imitate! I suspect you of a habit of brooding over things——

JACK. We cannot all have your happy disposition——

MARQUIS. Every pavement has its sunny side [*turns and goes up*]—we have only to exercise proper selection. Dear me, is that Lady Daintree—you will excuse me——

[*He goes off hastily, passing the dancers who are returning. Among these are* LADY ALETHEA *and* DALLAS. *They go to* JACK. LADY ALETHEA *is* LUCY'S *sister, and very much like* LUCY. *She has* LUCY'S *hair and complexion; she has* LUCY'S *smile; but she is a statelier person, taller too, rather more important. Her voice is soft and beautiful; and she has very great charm.* MR DALLAS *is the usual kind of young man, but better-looking than most, and he has a way with him—he is full of confidence and assurance, and tremendously at home with women.*

DALLAS. All alone, Frobisher? Have you been practising the cake-walk?

ALETHEA [*laughing*]. Fancy poor Jack doing anything so frivolous!

DALLAS. Your husband is a philosopher, Lady Alethea; he despises us mere worldlings.

JACK. On the contrary, my dear Dallas—I envy you profoundly.

DALLAS. Do you, though? Well, I would cheerfully change places.

JACK. What! Would the butterfly turn elephant?

DALLAS. Now I put it to you, Lady Alethea, am I a butterfly?

ALETHEA. I regard you as a most substantial, solid, and meditative person. Jack, will you fetch me my fan? I left it in the ball-room. [JACK *goes off, looking none too pleased.*

DALLAS. Your husband doesn't like me.

ALETHEA. He wants every one to be as serious as he is. Ah, me! [*She sits.*

DALLAS. You sigh?

ALETHEA. It's a dreadful thing to be serious. You never are.

DALLAS Is that a quality?

ALETHEA. It's a relief.

DALLAS. Don't you think I mean what I say to you?

ALETHEA. Dear me, no. Unless constant repetition is a proof of sincerity.

DALLAS. I don't think you quite know me——

ALETHEA. That is probably the reason for my liking you.

DALLAS. Then you do like me?

ALETHEA. I am prepared to give you a certificate in writing to that effect.

DALLAS. They say there are sixty-seven different ways in which a woman can like a man.

ALETHEA. Really! And in how many ways does a man like a woman?

DALLAS. Two. He either likes her or he loves her.

ALETHEA. And in how many ways does a man love a woman?

DALLAS. I should have said there are several. Now I know there is only one.

ALETHEA. How dull! And do you really wish me to believe that you love all women in precisely the same way?

DALLAS. I love one woman, and only one. I thought you knew it.

ALETHEA [*merrily*]. She has not honoured me—[*rising*]—with her confidence. Here comes Jack with my fan. *You* had better go and have an ice. And please ask Alice Sabinet to dance.

DALLAS. If you wish it. But——

ALETHEA. She has scarcely danced at all, poor darling.

DALLAS. I obey. [*He rises, bows, and goes as* JACK *returns.*

ALETHEA [*taking the fan*]. Thank you. Tell me, why were you so rude to Mr Dallas?

JACK. Was I rude?

ALETHEA. You cultivate a deliberate boorishness. Is it because you are rich?

JACK. I don't think I pride myself on my money.

ALETHEA. You seem to. Mr Dallas is my friend. He treats you with scrupulous courtesy. Why should you be rude?

JACK. I really didn't mean to be.

ALETHEA. You are uncivil to every man I care for. The fact is you hate me to speak to a man at all.

JACK. Ally!

ALETHEA. Yes, *it's true.* You would like to shut me up in a harem, and do nothing all day but listen to your schemes for workmen's dwellings and improved sanitation. Why don't you discuss them with Mamma? You ought to have married Mamma.

JACK. You are very cruel to me.

ALETHEA. You are cruel to yourself. You mope, I want to laugh.

JACK. We used to laugh—together.

ALETHEA. On our honeymoon. You were nice—then. But we've been married three years, and now you want me to be dull, and a dowdy. I'm sure you disapprove of my dress.

JACK. I should like to kiss you—— And I will too!

[*He kisses her, she defending herself feebly, murmuring,* "*Oh, Jack, you'll make me so untidy!*"

ALETHEA. Why were you so rude to Mr Dallas?

JACK. I'm sorry if I was rude.

ALETHEA. He's going to take me to supper. Do you object?

JACK. . . . No . . .

ALETHEA. That's fortunate. He's the best dancer in the room. Why don't you dance?

JACK. I wish I could.

ALETHEA. It's a marvel to me how you ever made all your money!

JACK. Am I such a fool, do you think?

ALETHEA. Oh, no, but so helpless. Though, of course, your sheep multiplied, and all you had to do was to cut off the wool. Anyone could have done that.

JACK. Is that what Mr Dallas says?

ALETHEA [*rising*]. Now aren't you a goose? Do you think he talks about you? You're a baby, that's what you are—a jealous baby.

JACK. Yes, I'm jealous.

ALETHEA. I don't mind that in the least, only please don't show it. Here comes that odious Mr Hannaford. [*Enter* HANNAFORD *and* TINY.] I'm afraid I'm engaged to him——

TINY [*coming up to her*]. Good night, Alethea—I'm off.

ALETHEA. Bridge?

TINY. For an hour or two. I promised the Duchess. We're wasting time here.

ALETHEA. Mind you're not late to-morrow; we'll start directly after lunch. [TINY *goes out.*

HANNAFORD. Lady Alethea, this is my dance.

ALETHEA. I make the stipulation that you shall limit yourself to three epigrams.

HANNAFORD. Shall you fast while I feast?

ALETHEA. That is quite beyond me; but it shall count for one. You have only two left.

[*She rises and takes his arm. As they go they meet* HANKEY BANNISTER *and* LADY WESTERBY *coming in.* HANKEY BANNISTER *is of the same type as* JACK, *but redder in the face, stockier in build, clumsier, and more awkward. Oddly he is quite unabashed in this smart assembly, enjoying himself like a child, and tumbling about quite happily.* LADY WESTERBY *is a woman of forty, with unmistakable*

*distinction; her hair is heavily tinged with grey and her face is lined, but she has an extraordinarily captivating smile, and her voice is curiously soft and melodious.*

ALETHEA [*to* LADY WESTERBY]. Oh, Guin, how late you are! Please talk to poor Jack. He's so dull. [ALETHEA *moves on, following the rest of the dancers,* HANNAFORD *whispers to her.*] That makes two, Mr Hannaford. [*They go;* JACK *advances to* LADY WESTERBY.

JACK. Good evening, Lady Westerby.

LADY WESTERBY. I'm bringing an old friend to you, Mr Frobisher.

[HANKEY *comes forward laughing, with outstretched hands;* JACK *stares at him.*

JACK. Why, it's Mad Jim!

HANKEY. Jack! Well met, old pal, well met.

[*They shake hands with the utmost vigour and cordiality.*

LADY WESTERBY. Mad Jim!

JACK. You must forgive us, Lady Westerby—we haven't met since we were in Queensland together, a good many years ago—I raising sheep, and he prospecting for gold. No wonder that I didn't know the name of Hankey Bannister! [LADY WESTERBY *sits on ottoman.*

HANKEY [*gleefully*]. It sounds better than Mad Jim, don't it, your ladyship? We called him Fighting Jack, out there.

LADY WESTERBY. Mr Frobisher is wondering how I came to know you. Please tell him.

HANKEY. Now?

LADY WESTERBY. Yes.

HANKEY [*with sudden gravity*]. A sister of mine was in London, some few years ago, when I hadn't a penny to send her; and she fell in with Lady Westerby, who stood her firm friend. The poor girl's dead now, but her letters were full of Lady Westerby; and my first visit in town was to her, as my first nugget went to her that I picked up.

LADY WESTERBY. With a note—"from Helen Bannister's brother." And I mean to launch that brother, and find him a wife. No, Mr Frobisher, I do *not* intend to marry him myself. Mr Bannister did me the honour to propose, as a matter of duty and gratitude, within forty-eight hours of his arrival.

HANKEY. Oh, Lady Westerby, that was a secret!

LADY WESTERBY. I think your friend Fighting Jack dislikes me, but I have a great respect for him. Perhaps he won't dislike me quite so much now?

JACK. As my father-in-law would say, that is an awkward question to put to a gallant man. I have never disliked you, Lady Westerby, but it has been my misfortune not to know you. Now that I do know, I am very anxious to know more.

LADY WESTERBY. Your answer has all Lord Steventon's eloquence,

with, I trust, more than his usual sincerity. And now of course you two are anxious to be alone. I will go the moment you have told me why you were given those nicknames.

JACK. Never mind about mine; but I will tell you why he was called Mad Jim. He had got a fancy into his head that because he was the seventh son of a seventh son he possessed strange powers of second sight——

HANKEY [*roaring with laughter*]. Oh, Lord, how sure I was!

JACK. And he used to dig in the unlikeliest and most impossible places, because he had a sort of intuition that he would find gold there, but he never did. And he would start again, somewhere else, with unimpaired confidence. So you've struck it, Jim?

HANKEY. Struck it rich, Jack, rich.

LADY WESTERBY. There must have been a method in his madness, after all!—And why was Mr Frobisher called Fighting Jack?

HANKEY. A set of blacks went mad on rum, attacked a lonely farmhouse, killed the man, and carried off his wife and child. Jack went after them single-handed——

JACK. That will do, Jim, thank you. They called me Fighting Jack, Lady Westerby, because it was a wild country, and a man had to use his fists a bit, and be handy with his gun, so as to keep fellows like our friend Jim here in order.

HANKEY. Yes, he was Boss out there, he made the laws. What Fighting Jack said had to be done, and everybody knew it.

JACK. Tut, tut——

LADY WESTERBY. How is it we never hear of your Australian experiences, Mr Frobisher?

JACK. I doubt whether they would contain much that would interest——

LADY WESTERBY [*rising*]. I shall ask, on some future occasion, to be allowed to judge that for myself. And now I will keep my word, and leave you two to your talk. *Au revoir!*

[*She goes into the ballroom.* JACK *and* HANKEY *sit.*

HANKEY. Well, Jack, old pal? I told you I'd get there in time.

JACK. I've wondered over and over again what had become of you, Jim. We were pals, we two—why didn't you let me know—when things went against you?

HANKEY. I left Queensland owing you a pretty tidy pile; and since then I've been wandering all over the world, and poor as Job till eighteen months ago; then I struck it, in Arizona. When I came here to-night Lady Westerby mentioned you. Frobisher! I hadn't forgotten the name! Well! And here we are, we two, in a marquis's parlour!

JACK. And how long do you mean to stay here, Jim?

HANKEY [*laughing*]. Stay, is it? I'm here for good! When do *you* mean to go back to Queensland? You're tidily fixed up, her ladyship tells me?

JACK. I've a house in Grosvenor Square, a place in the country, a shooting-box in Scotland, a yacht on the Solent——

HANKEY. Jimimi! And you married a marquis's daughter!

JACK. Yes, I married a marquis's daughter.

[*A youngster hurries into the room, as though looking for some one; he sees* JACK, *goes to him, and taps him on the shoulder. He is a fine, athletic fellow, with a weak but very attractive face. At the moment he betrays every sign of being uncommonly worried.*

JACK. Max! My brother-in-law, Lord Drayton—Mr Bannister.

MAX [*nervously*]. I want a word with you—quick!

JACK [*to* HANKEY]. Excuse me one moment. [HANKEY *moves away.*

JACK [*severely and a trifle contemptuously*]. Well?

MAX. Don't you be down on me too! I want your advice!

JACK. It's a bit late for that. You should have come before.

MAX. It was only found out to-day. And, I say, they've turned her out!

JACK. So I hear.

MAX. It's awful to think of! I haven't a cent. What can I do?

JACK. There's only one thing to do.

MAX. Will you stand by me?

JACK. I'll come to your room by and bye, and we'll have a talk.

MAX. Before you go, to-night?

JACK. Yes.

MAX. Promise?

JACK. Yes, I'll come.

[MAX *shakes* JACK *eagerly by the hand, and goes quickly.*

HANKEY. Nice-looking boy. Seems a bit worried?

JACK. A little adventure with his sister's companion.

HANKEY. What! You don't mean——? The blackguard! I beg your pardon——

JACK. So you should! It's the merest trifle. Lord Steventon has done the right thing—the lady is gone. My dear chap, a girl more or less! In our set these things don't count. [*Enter* ALETHEA *and* LUCY.] But see, there's my wife—come with me, I'll introduce you. Ally, this is an old friend of mine, Hankey Bannister. My wife and her sister, Lady Lucy Derenham.

ALETHEA. Glad to meet you, Mr Bannister. You knew Jack, in prehistoric days?

HANKEY Old pals, he and I, my lady. Fighting Jack, we called him out there.

ALETHEA. Fighting Jack! Oh, how nice! I didn't know he could fight. Can you, Jack?

HANKEY. Got a fist like a sledge-hammer, my lady.

ALETHEA. Really? There, I've discovered a quality in him at last! Lucy! Have you ever noticed Jack's fist? Fighting Jack, they called him. And so you've found gold, Mr Bannister?

HANKEY. Yes, I have, my lady. Bucketsful.

ALETHEA. How nice! And it sounds very easy. All one has to do is to go somewhere, borrow a pickaxe, and dig. If I were a man I'd start for somewhere to-morrow.

HANKEY. I've come back with a pile, but there's a good many bones, by the banks of the river, that the ravens have picked clean.

ALETHEA. Ugh! Mr Hannaford would make an epigram on that, wouldn't he, Lucy? I wish the ravens would make an epigram on Mr Hannaford—he *has* bored me so terribly! Jack, Mr Bannister must dine with us to-morrow. You'll come, won't you? Used Jack to be very talkative when you knew him, Mr Bannister?

HANKEY. He was never a man to waste words, my lady.

ALETHEA. Oh, that's very diplomatic, isn't it, Lucy? See, here's Papa. Papa is puffing, which is a sign of deep agitation. Do you want Mr Bannister, Papa? He is telling me how to find gold.

[*The* MARQUIS *has come in, and goes to* HANKEY, *with outstretched hand.*

MARQUIS. My dear Mr Bannister, Lady Westerby assures me that you and Jack are old friends. I need scarcely say that Jack's friends are mine. I'm sorry you have come so late. Do you wish to dance? Lucy, have you any dances left?

LUCY. Not one, Papa. [ALETHEA *gives* JACK *her fan.*

MARQUIS. Never mind a broken heart or two, my child; make room for Mr Bannister. Give him the next.

LUCY [*coyly*]. Mr Bannister has not asked for it—he may not want it.

HANKEY [*eagerly*]. Oh, but I do! Only I can't dance—I mean to learn.

ALETHEA. That shows a proper spirit—Jack despises dancing. [DALLAS *comes up and bows.*] Are you my partner, Mr Dallas? Lucy, give Mr Bannister his first lesson—how to sit out a waltz!

[*They all go off together, leaving the* MARQUIS *and* JACK *alone.*

MARQUIS. He seems a very pleasant person, Jack—that friend of yours. A trifle rough, of course—but the material is sound—it only needs polishing. You will put in a word for me?

JACK. For you?

MARQUIS. These men are always floating companies—he might like my name on the Board.

JACK. I'm afraid the public have grown rather shy of titles on a prospectus.

MARQUIS. That's so, unfortunately. There *was* a time when I could get a thousand guineas down, and three hundred a year, for signing my name. Oh, we've fallen on evil days! But, my dear boy, I am ridiculously hard up. And I've just had a little flutter in Kaffirs—that has fluttered the wrong way.

JACK. I thought you had made up your mind to leave the Stock Exchange alone.

MARQUIS. It was Oldenburg himself who gave me the tip. Oldenburg! At the Carlton—I had invited him to lunch. Buy Koffymodders, he said. He even went so far as to urge me to stake my undergarments on Koffymodders. And Koffymodders have gone down ever since.

JACK. Naturally.

MARQUIS. And, till my rents come in, I am . . . just a trifle . . . inconvenienced.

JACK. How much do you want?

MARQUIS. My dear fellow, there is a directness about that question which jars.

JACK [*grimly*]. To what extent may I be permitted to oblige you?

MARQUIS. Ah! My dear boy, if you could spare a thousand——

JACK. I will pay it in to your account at Coutts's to-morrow. [*Crosses.*] But you will forgive me if I——

MARQUIS [*stopping him with a gesture*]. If I ever touch Kaffirs again, may I—become a teetotaller. And vegetarian. No, you needn't be afraid! I met Oldenburg in the Mall to-day, and had the satisfaction of cutting the odious creature dead. But, by the way, Jack—this Mr Bannister—is he married?

JACK. No.

MARQUIS. How about Lucy?

JACK. She is in love with her cousin.

MARQUIS. At her age one is always in love with a cousin! Do what you can.

JACK. In what way?

MARQUIS. My dear boy, we shall have every dowager in full cry after Bannister, and Lucy, poor child, is practically motherless, now that my misguided lady wife concerns herself solely with what is passing in heaven!

JACK. Lady Westerby has constituted herself Bannister's guardian.

MARQUIS. But you, as an old friend, would of course have great influence. A word from you! And I flatter myself that you—who are *de la maison*—can recommend it.

JACK [*quietly*]. I have been most extraordinarily fortunate.

MARQUIS. When first I set eyes on you I divined your quality. The future of my poor Lucy disturbs me at times; men are so mercenary nowadays! See, here they are—they are getting on splendidly.

[HANKEY *comes in with* LUCY *on his arm.*

MARQUIS. Well, Mr Bannister, have you had your first lesson?

HANKEY. Not in dancing, my lord; and admiration comes natural.

MARQUIS. Your exile has not blunted your wit. Ah, you are going to supper?

[WILFRED RENTON *has sauntered in and goes up to* LUCY. *He is a pleasant youngster of the ordinary pattern.*

WILFRED. You'll go in with me, Lucy?

LUCY. Will I? Won't I? That depends. I'm doing a little speculation in gold-mines.

WILFRED. Lucy!

LUCY. My dear Wilfred, don't be silly! Please retire into the background, with the grace that becomes you.

WILFRED [*reproachfully*]. You gave my dance to that fellow.

LUCY. Of course I did. Go and look for an heiress.

WILFRED. Lucy!

LUCY [*merrily*]. How well you do it! Just the right tone of voice. And the look—B.42, wasn't it?

WILFRED. So the moment has come when my heart is to break?

LUCY. Remember our compact:

"Too poor to woo,
We can't be true,
So now, shoo!"

[*She gives him a playful push.*

HANKEY [*turning and seeing* WILFRED]. Is this the gentleman whose dance I commandeered?

WILFRED. Yes.

HANKEY. Lady Lucy, I'll play the noble Roman, and resign you to him. [*Exit* LUCY *and* WILFRED.

MARQUIS. Well, we must find you another partner.

HANKEY. Guess I'll stay here, if I may, and have a bit of a talk with Jack.

JACK. I'm afraid I'm engaged to Lady Carstairs.

MARQUIS. I will make your excuses to that lady; and venture, however inadequately, to take your place. Stay with your friend. We three will have a little supper to ourselves, later on!

[*The* MARQUIS *goes into the ballroom, the others all pass out to the left.*

JACK [*moves to fireplace and sits on fender*]. Well, Jim! And what do you mean to do here? Marry, and settle down?

HANKEY. That's so. I'll do like you. *I'll* have a house in Grosvenor Square, a place in the country, a shooting-box in Scotland, a yacht on the—where? [*Sits on settee.*

JACK. The Solent.

HANKEY. And a yacht on the Solent. By George, it makes my mouth water! You see a lot of people?

JACK. We have house-parties in the country right through the autumn.

HANKEY. You've a big place, eh?

JACK. Forty bedrooms.

HANKEY. Jimimi! I'll have forty bedrooms too!

JACK. With a man or woman in each one of them whom I don't care a rap about, and who don't care a rap about me.

HANKEY. Swells?

JACK. They're known as "the Smart Set."

HANKEY. Is it difficult to get into "the Smart Set"?

JACK. What are you worth?

HANKEY. It'll figure something like forty thousand a year.

JACK. Then you'll be welcome everywhere.

HANKEY. As easy as that, eh? H'm—I had hoped it was a bit harder. . . Of course, you had the luck to marry Lady——

[*He tries to remember the name.*

JACK. Alethea.

HANKEY. Lady Alethea. Pretty name. I say, I like her sister.

JACK. You do, eh?

HANKEY. Tell me, do you think that I——?

JACK. What?

HANKEY. *You* know! Have I a chance?

JACK [*surprised*]. *You* want to marry Lucy?

HANKEY. Why not?

JACK [*rising*]. You're the same Mad Jim you were. Look at me, you idiot! Look at me!

HANKEY. Well, I'm looking.

JACK. Hankey Bannister, if you want to be happy, I'll tell you what you should do. Keep a thousand a year for yourself, and give the rest of your money to the Trustees for the National Debt.

HANKEY. Who's mad now?

JACK. *I* came home with a pile, five years ago: I felt just as you feel. *I* wanted to get into "the Smart Set"; *I* liked to shake hands with them, go to their houses, and belong to their clubs. Well, I did it all, and you can do it; I lost my money at billiards and cards and betting, and the winners liked me because I lost. I spent my afternoons lending fivers and tenners to younger sons: anyone who wanted money had only to come to me: and they did come, men and women!

I gave lunches, dinners, suppers—theatre-parties, race-parties, river-parties; and divided a great many thousands among a handful of idle men and women, who tolerated me because I provided them with amusement. And then, just as the taste of it was beginning to pall, I fell in love, and married. That was my one stroke of luck. My wife has a head and a heart; and if she hadn't the misfortune to be the daughter of that exquisite old dodderer she would be a fine woman.

HANKEY. She's very beautiful.

JACK. Yes, but she is more than beautiful—she has a soul. Only she has been brought up in this miserable set—where the women do nothing but gamble and bet and flirt and talk scandal, and she can no more shake herself free than you and I can become 'gentlemen,' and talk with an infernal drawl. We've a little son, but it's considered bad form to bother about your baby. It's bad form to think, or feel, or have an idea; you must make love to every woman you meet, or else she votes you a bore. You must wear the same grin on your face from morning to night; you mustn't be what you are, you mustn't *be* at all; you must resemble the others, dance with the others, laugh with the others; and if you don't they call you extreme, and say you're a crank.

HANKEY. It's like that, eh?

JACK. Out in Queensland I was voted a fairly strong man. As you said, I was Boss. The luck had been with me, of course—money rolled in—but I made good use of that money. The last five years I was there I raised cities, brought water down from the hills, made homes for men. In Queensland I was a power; and I said to myself I'll go back, there'll be room for me in Old England. And I chuckled, just at the start, when I found all the dandies cringing. I said to myself, "Wait a bit—I'll show you what stuff I'm made of!" And I married, and shook off the fools, and thought I'd be Boss, as I had been out there.

HANKEY. And aren't you?

JACK. Boss! I found myself snared, caught by the heels, trapped! I found that I had grown sensitive to ridicule: and I live in the midst of people who only smile. I found that my will had forsaken me, that I no longer wanted to do things, that I had become a mere doll and a puppet. And now the rebellion in me is dying away: my wife does what she likes with me: my father-in-law, my friends, all the people I meet, look on me as a kind of mild imbecile; the schemes I started languish because I haven't the pluck to carry them out; and I tell you that I, who have power to do things, I merely cumber the earth, and loaf—and all this because I came home with a pile, and thought myself a strong man! And now, Mad Jim, what will you do?

HANKEY. Well, if you think I've a chance with Lady Lucy——

[*Enter* LUCY, WILFRED, LADY PARCHESTER, TWELVETREES, *etc*

JACK. Ah, you old ass! So that's it, eh? Very well, then—each man for himself—begin your training! The cake-walk's the fashionable thing to do. Look here, I'll show you!

[*They dance a few steps while the guests, who are straggling in, stand round and applaud vociferously.*

## ACT II

ALETHEA'S *boudoir. A door at back and at left centre.* ALETHEA, LADY PARCHESTER, *the* DUCHESS OF SKYE, *and* MISS TINY MORNINGTON *are playing at bridge. The* DUCHESS, *it must be admitted, does not look like a duchess at all. She is middle-aged, carelessly dressed; her hair is untidy, and she has thin lips and an aggressive nose.* LUCY *is looking on. All the ladies are smoking. As the curtain rises the cards are being dealt by the* DUCHESS, *and each player collects her hand.*

DUCHESS. I call no trumps.

TINY. Shall I play to no trumps, partner?

ALETHEA. I double no trumps.

DUCHESS. You do? I redouble. That makes forty-eight.

ALETHEA [*after a moment's hesitation*]. I am content.

TINY. So am I. I have to be. And I play. Oh, partner, I haven't a heart to lead to you! [*She plays a card.*

ALETHEA. Gurrr! . . . Lucy, go away, please, I want to swear.

DUCHESS. What luck! Look here, I can put my cards down. I have the ace of spades, ace and king of diamonds, and ten clubs to the ace, king, queen. I've never held such a hand in my life. It's a big slam! [*They all throw down their cards.*

ALETHEA. It's a true bill.

LADY PARCHESTER. Partner, you're an angel! I hadn't a trick in my hand. That's game and rubber. Seven times forty-eight: three hundred and thirty-six below and seventy above. [*They add on their scoring-boards.*] Six hundred and twenty. You agree?

ALETHEA [*scoring*]. I make it six hundred and ten.

DUCHESS. No, no.

TINY. Six hundred and twenty's right. Six hundred and twenty shillings is thirty-one pounds; and ten pounds for the rubber makes forty-one. I shall have to owe it to you, Gladys. I'll pay you to-night.

ALETHEA [*beckoning to* LUCY *for her purse*]. Lucy—thank you. Here, Duchess, ten, twenty, thirty, forty—and a sovereign. I don't know *how* much I've lost to-day! Let's cut for partners.

DUCHESS [*rising*]. I'm sorry—I can't play any more—I have to be going.

ALETHEA. Oh, Duchess, you'll break up the table!

DUCHESS. I'm ever so sorry—but I've promised to meet the Duke.

TINY. He won't mind waiting half an hour.

DUCHESS. He would be *furious*—— I daren't! Good-bye, Alethea, Tiny—— We're coming to you to-night, Gladys. Good-bye, Lucy.

[*She goes.* ALETHEA *rises.* LUCY *rings bell at fireplace.*

TINY. The cat!

LADY PARCHESTER. Whenever she has pulled off a big thing she has to meet the Duke.

TINY. Yes. One can imagine him waiting at street corners for his lovely Duchess!

ALETHEA. I've had an awful day—— I must have lost at least two hundred pounds.

LADY PARCHESTER. What a tremendous hand she held!

ALETHEA. Well, we'll have tea. I've really half a mind not to touch another card.

LUCY. Till next time.

ALETHEA. Be quiet, you little thing. [SIMPSON *enters.*] Tea, please. And put away the table. I'm at home now. Oh, Tiny, why didn't you have a heart?

TINY. You had a lot of them?

ALETHEA. Eight—to the ace, king, queen. That silly woman had no right to redouble.

TINY. I expect she saw my hand.

ALETHEA. I dare say. She's capable of anything.

LADY PARCHESTER. I could have stopped the rot in hearts, you know. I had four to the knave.

LUCY. Look here, if you're going to talk nothing but bridge, I'll leave you. It's bad enough to see you play.

TINY. It's an education for you, dear.

LUCY. I hate the beastly game.

LADY PARCHESTER. O Lucy, what a shocking thing to say!

LUCY. There's no commandment about loving bridge.

TINY. If there had been, the game would have gone out long ago. But at least we love our partner like ourselves.

LADY PARCHESTER. And *that* can be carried to extremes! You heard about Lady Mayfield and Captain O'Connor?

TINY. Oh, isn't that a ducky story? They had arranged to elope; they went on playing rubber after rubber, and missed their train.

ALETHEA. Where were they playing?

TINY. At Mrs Warden's. Lady Mayfield had a run of luck, and wouldn't stop. But it was Captain O'Connor was lucky.

LUCY. Why?

TINY. Well, of course, they didn't elope after all; but he lost nothing by it.

LADY PARCHESTER. You mean?

ALETHEA. Lucy's here.

LUCY. Oh, don't mind me! I'd far rather you talked scandal than bridge. But how on earth could anyone want to elope with Lady Mayfield?

TINY. She's precisely the sort of woman a man would elope with.

LUCY. Why?

TINY. Alethea wouldn't like my telling you.

ALETHEA. Certainly not. Tiny, you are far too well informed for a maiden lady.

TINY. The *ingénue* has gone out.

LUCY. What about me?

TINY. You're a baby.

LUCY. Am I? I know a great deal more than you think.

ALETHEA. Lucy, if you're not good I'll send you to bed.

LADY PARCHESTER. How dreadfully disappointed poor Sir John must have been that his wife didn't go!

TINY. Poor man! They had settled the damages, you know—five thousand pounds.

LUCY. For Lady Mayfield!

LADY PARCHESTER. Sir John would have parted with fifty wives for that.

ALETHEA. Well, better luck next time.

TINY. She has got hold of a Spaniard now—enormously rich—very young, and thinks she's all real!

[SIMPSON *and* FOOTMEN *come in with tea.*

LUCY. Fancy! How foolish men are! Why, surely anyone could see——

ALETHEA. Now, Lucy, you've got to be good. What would Mamma say? Lucy, pour out the tea. The child's staying with me for a couple of days. [*Exit* SIMPSON.] Oh, the shocking luck I've had this week! I've lost a fortune. Jack *will* be angry.

LUCY. I wish that he would be for once. He's oceans too good for you.

TINY. We shall say that of Wilfred, my dear, when you're married to him.

LUCY. Marry Wilfred! Why, he hasn't a penny.

TINY. You don't care for love in a cottage?

LUCY. Why *will* you treat me as though I were a baby?

ALETHEA. I really don't think I'll play any more.

LADY PARCHESTER. Alethea! You won't break up my party to-night!

ALETHEA. Well, I'll try this once—but if my luck doesn't change——

[LUCY *hands her cup.*

LADY PARCHESTER. Dinner at eight sharp, you know.

TINY. It's a pity—they're doing *Tristan* at the Opera——

LADY PARCHESTER. Why, *you* are not going to desert us!

TINY. Oh, no; but I love *Tristan.* I never have time to go, of course.

LUCY. *I'm* fond of the Opera. One can have such lovely talks in the boxes! [*Enter* JACK.

TINY. Ah! Mr Frobisher!

LADY PARCHESTER. Are you coming with Alethea to-night?

JACK. To-night? We're dining at home.

ALETHEA. No, no, Jack.

JACK. Why, you asked Hankey Bannister——

ALETHEA. Oh, dear, so I did. Well, you must excuse me. I had quite forgotten.

LADY PARCHESTER. Why not bring him to me?

JACK. He doesn't play bridge.

LADY PARCHESTER. He might like to look on. Why don't *you* play, Mr Frobisher?

ALETHEA. Oh, he cares for no games except cricket and football, and things like that, where you can hurt yourself. Jack, I've been shockingly unlucky.

JACK. Ah! . . .

LADY PARCHESTER. What a divine husband who only says "Ah!" when his wife tells him that! My darling nearly has a fit.

JACK. How is Lord Parchester?

LADY PARCHESTER. I don't know. I haven't seen him for the last three days. I haven't the least idea where he is.

TINY. You should offer a reward, Gladys.

LADY PARCHESTER. "Of no value to anyone, least of all to the owner!"

TINY [*moving to* JACK]. Mr Frobisher, is this Mr Bannister the one they've been writing about?

JACK. I suppose so.

TINY. A bachelor?

JACK. Yes.

TINY. He's a millionaire, isn't he?

JACK. He's very rich.

TINY. Then will you say a word for me, please? Twenty-nine, distinguished-looking, daughter of a bishop. Strict religious education. Excellent references.

JACK. I'll tell him.

TINY. Of a loving disposition, and the usual accomplishments. Does he drop his *h*'s?

JACK. No.

TINY. Deevy! May I consider myself engaged?

ALETHEA. What a madcap you are, Tiny!

TINY. My dear friend, it's quite time I got married: and you none of you do anything for me. My income from bridge is regular; but, after all, not as safe as Consols.

LADY PARCHESTER. She's a beautiful player.

TINY. It's my bread and butter. But when I'm Mrs Bannister I shall be able to afford myself the luxury of an occasional opera. You'll recommend me, Mr Frobisher?

JACK. Warmly.

TINY. I'm quite serious, you know. Mr Bannister will probably want to marry; and I'm fully prepared to love anyone who's rich. Now I think I'll be going.

LADY PARCHESTER. I must be off too. I'll drive you, Tiny. Good-bye, Alethea—good-bye, Lucy. *Au revoir*, Mr Frobisher.

JACK. *Au revoir.*

TINY [*to* JACK]. Good-bye. And, as Charles I said to Bishop Juxon, "Remember!"

JACK. You only propose to lose your heart.

TINY. My head will go with it. Good-bye!

[*She and* LADY PARCHESTER *go.*

ALETHEA. Jack, I want some money.

[*She sits, and lights a cigarette.*

JACK. Again!

ALETHEA. I told you I had been very unlucky. Isn't it awful? I never once held a decent hand. That wretched Duchess must have the Evil Eye.

JACK. How much do you want?

ALETHEA. I haven't a penny. And I don't believe there's much at the bank.

JACK. I had a notice this morning that your account was considerably overdrawn.

ALETHEA. The poor thing! It sounds like vivisection!

LUCY [*rising*]. Jack, if you want to scold her, I'll go.

JACK. Oh, you needn't! It's no use my saying anything. Alethea does what she likes.

ALETHEA. Now isn't that absurd? Do you think I like holding bad cards?

JACK. My dear Alethea——

LUCY. Here, I'm off. [*She laughs and goes into the inner room.*

ALETHEA. Well, if it's to be a lecture let it be short. I'm all meekness and attention.

JACK. What's the good? I've said it all before.

ALETHEA. That's true.

JACK. You would only tell me I bore you.

ALETHEA. I trust I am too polite to say that.

JACK. I will pay in five hundred.

ALETHEA. Thank you.

JACK. By the way, I've had to lend your father some money again.

ALETHEA. Papa's shockingly extravagant—I shall really have to speak to him.

JACK. Have you seen Archie to-day?

ALETHEA. Have I? I think so. Oh, yes, of course I have.

JACK. As I was strolling home through the Park I came across the little chap, in his perambulator, left all alone, and the nurse flirting with a soldier.

ALETHEA. The wretch! I wish you'd speak to her!

JACK. I did. She gave notice on the spot.

ALETHEA. There! Now I shall have to find another! Oh, you are a provoking man!

JACK. Is your time so exhaustively occupied that you cannot spare an hour to look after your own son?

ALETHEA. Do you want me to wheel him about? You are too absurd. Don't you think your nurse flirted with soldiers?

JACK. I didn't have a nurse.

ALETHEA. Because your mother couldn't afford it, that's all.

JACK. We were very poor, of course—but no man ever had a better mother than I. [ALETHEA *rises and goes to fireplace.*

ALETHEA. I know, I know. You've told me so often. And your mother nursed you herself, and I did *not* nurse Archie. I'm a heartless wretch, and so on. Shall we skip that part? [JACK *rises.*

JACK. Ally——

ALETHEA. Yes?

JACK. Does it ever occur to you that you are making me very unhappy?

ALETHEA. You make *yourself* unhappy. You are always grizzling. Why can't you take things as they are?

JACK. A man can't alter his nature. And I don't think I ask very much of you.

ALETHEA. But you do; yesterday you scowled at me because I was dancing with Harry Dallas——

JACK. *Harry* Dallas?

ALETHEA. That's his name.

JACK. Do you call him Harry?

ALETHEA. Oh, don't be so ridiculous Of course I call him Harry. Every one calls him Harry.

JACK. Ah!

ALETHEA. I don't know what you want. All the women we know call the men by their Christian names.

JACK [*putting his hands on her shoulders*]. You are aware that I strongly object to your intimacy with him?

ALETHEA [*crossing to settee and sitting*]. And I strongly object to your objection, so we are quits, and need say no more.

JACK. You can't make this little sacrifice for me?

ALETHEA. You've no right to ask it. I'm a free woman—I'm not a slave. And I've a grievance of my own. If you must always wear such a melancholy face when you go out, you had much better stay at home. Every one was laughing at you last night.

JACK. Indeed?

ALETHEA. Of course. You looked as though you had a violent pain inside. It's really stupid, you know. If it bores you so much, why go?

JACK. Because you go.

ALETHEA. I'm not a child—I fancy I can be trusted by myself.

JACK. It's not a question of confidence. [*He sits beside her.*

ALETHEA. What, then?

JACK. Put it that I like to see you.

ALETHEA. You are always jealous of the man I'm talking to.

JACK [*taking her hand*]. There are certain men whom I do not consider fit associates for you.

ALETHEA. I can't accept your judgment—you are too prejudiced. And now let us drop the subject. I don't interfere with you. [*She gets up and moves away.*] I don't tell you how ridiculous it is to fritter away thousands in the East End.

JACK. That is very good of you.

ALETHEA. I let you live your own life—you must really do the same by me. We shall both be the happier for it. And here Mr Balfour moved the closure! Where *has* that silly Lucy got to? [*She moves to the inner door.*] Have you seen Mr Bannister to-day?

JACK. No; he's coming to dinner.

ALETHEA. Of course. Lucy shall do the honours, it's just as well. You'll leave them together for a little?

JACK. Are *you* matchmaking too?

ALETHEA. One must do what one can for one's sister.

JACK. And how about Wilfred?

ALETHEA. Now what *has* Wilfred to do with it? She can't marry Wilfred, can she?

JACK. She's in love with him——

ALETHEA. Of course—but that doesn't matter.

[*She opens the door and calls.*

JACK. Do you think it fair to Bannister?

ALETHEA. Fair? What *do* you mean?

JACK. You want her to pretend that she likes him.

ALETHEA. Oh, she'll do that all right.

JACK. I have a certain sense of honour——

ALETHEA [*pettishly*]. Oh, have it amputated, do! It's worse than appendicitis! Lucy! [LUCY *comes in.*

LUCY. Lecture over?

ALETHEA. See how crushed I am! Lucy, he wants to tell Mr Bannister about Wilfred!

LUCY [*laughing*]. What a silly old Jack it is! Why, Wilfred hasn't enough to pay for my gloves!

JACK. And what will you say to Bannister if he proposes?

LUCY [*dropping a curtsey*]. Thank you, Mr Bannister, I shall have much pleasure.

JACK. And not a word about Wilfred?

LUCY. Never a syllable! My dear Jack, I'm beastly poor, and I hate it.

JACK. You know what a loveless marriage means?

ALETHEA [*sitting on arm of chair*]. Oh, doesn't he talk like one of Mamma's dear bishops? Only he means it all, and they don't. Why not remind her, Jack, that marriage is a sacrament, and made in heaven, and so on? Bless his dear little innocent heart, he's so awfully serious about it! [*The* MARQUIS *stalks angrily into the room.*

MARQUIS. Lucy, go away. I have to talk to Jack and Alethea.

LUCY. Fresh ructions about Max, Papa? Do let me hear?

MARQUIS. I have told you to go at once.

LUCY. And Jack wonders at my wanting to marry! [*She goes.*

ALETHEA. What is the matter, Papa?

MARQUIS. My dear Jack, I have every respect for you: you have qualities that I admire most profoundly; you are a most generous and chivalrous person; but you will forgive me if I protest, most emphatically, against your interference in matters that concern me, and me alone.

ALETHEA. Why, what has he done?

MARQUIS. He has prevailed upon Max to marry that woman of his!

ALETHEA. No! Impossible!

MARQUIS. The boy dared tell me to my face——

ALETHEA [*with supreme indignation*]. Jack!

MARQUIS. He has offered him three thousand pounds, and a farm in Queensland!

ALETHEA [*derisively*]. A farm in Queensland!

MARQUIS. Neither more nor less. The heir to the title! To make a gross *mésalliance*, and become a farmer!

ALETHEA. There must be some mistake—it isn't possible.

MARQUIS. Perhaps Mr Frobisher will explain.

JACK. Max came to me—he loves the girl—and he feels there is only one thing he can do as an honest man——

MARQUIS. Rubbish, sir, rubbish! Pestilent and pernicious rubbish! An honest man must consider what he owes to his name and his rank. That is the first consideration.

JACK. He has wronged this girl, and is eager to repair the wrong——

MARQUIS. This is the merest transpontine sentiment; feeble, treacly melodrama.

JACK. Miss Merton is of very respectable family——

MARQUIS. Family, sir! A young woman who has disgraced herself has no family. And her father is of the usual kind of penniless and prolific parson. Truly, my dear fellow, I must ask you to descend from your ultra-moral attitude. Your virtue is becoming tedious. Wear a hair-shirt next your skin, if you choose, but allow my family to select their own linen! You will be good enough to tell Max that you withdraw your offer.

JACK. That is impossible.

MARQUIS [*swelling*]. What, sir, what! Impossible! Am I, the head of my house, to be interfered with and dictated to, as to the conduct of my own son? I flatter myself that I am the most patient of men; but upon my honour——

ALETHEA. Let me have a word with Jack, Papa. I fancy I can persuade him.

MARQUIS [*going to door*]. By all means, by all means. I leave our Christian knight in your hands. A little common sense, sir, is all that I ask. As for the boy, he has strict orders not to leave the house, so you will know where to find him. I have the honour to wish you good morning. [*The* MARQUIS *stalks out majestically.*

ALETHEA [*fiercely*]. I am angry with you; yes, angry.

JACK. I am sorry.

ALETHEA. You are so eaten up with conceit of yourself, so satisfied that you monopolize all the goodness of the world that . . . that . . . you are becoming simply unbearable.

JACK. You are saying rather awful things.

ALETHEA. I am saying what I think, what every one thinks. What business is this of yours? Max is a boy of twenty-five; he has done what thousands of boys have done before him. [JACK *makes a movement.*] Oh, I am sorry for the girl, of course; I will help her if I can. But what right have you to force my brother into a degrading marriage?

JACK. There is no question of forcing—he came to me of his own will——

ALETHEA. He has generous instincts; he went to you, as to an elder man, for sympathy and advice.

JACK. And I gave him both.

ALETHEA [*with rising vehemence*]. Is there no episode in your own past life that you look back on with regret? Oh, you make me hate the very name of virtue!

JACK. Alethea!

ALETHEA. Yes, you do! You good people are so horribly intolerant. You have the whole of the East End to practise on—can't you leave my family alone? You want to prevent Lucy making a good marriage, you want to drag Max down, ruin him, ship him off to Queensland. It is abominable, all this. Yes, abominable. And I will not have it!

[*She stands before* JACK *with flashing eyes; he remains stolidly quiet.* SIMPSON *comes in, with* LADY WESTERBY; *he announces her and remains trying to speak with* ALETHEA.

ALETHEA [*going towards her*]. Ah, Guin! You are just in time. I was nearly losing my temper!

LADY WESTERBY. Am I interrupting a *tête-à-tête*?

ALETHEA. Most pleasantly, I assure you. [*To* SIMPSON] Well, what is it?

SIMPSON. His lordship has returned, my lady, and would like a word with you at once. He is in the library.

ALETHEA. Ah! I had better go to him. You will excuse me, Guin? I shan't be long. [*She goes, followed by* SIMPSON.

LADY WESTERBY. I imagine I can divine the subject of your conversation. I was very anxious to see you. Miss Merton is staying with me.

JACK. With you!

LADY WESTERBY. Yes. I know her, of course—I had met her at the Steventons'. I heard last night of the poor child's trouble. And I sought her out.

JACK. That was good of you. . . .

LADY WESTERBY. The girl is very unhappy. She has seen Max. And she has told me what you propose.

JACK. And you think?

LADY WESTERBY [*very emphatically*]. That your plan is noble, and generous and wise.

JACK. That point of view is not shared by my father-in-law.

LADY WESTERBY. Oh, he of course will place his own comfort above everything else in the world!

JACK. My wife agrees with him.

LADY WESTERBY. Alethea? [JACK *nods.*] Oh, you must persuade

her. She has a very good heart. She does not realize, that is all. Then I was not wrong? That *was* the subject of your conversation?

JACK. Yes. I need scarcely tell you how deeply I feel for Miss Merton. But I fear I am powerless.

LADY WESTERBY. Powerless? You?

JACK. Yes. You see——

LADY WESTERBY. What did they call you in Queensland?

JACK. Oh, Queensland! Out there one believed in things. Here it is different.

LADY WESTERBY. On the surface, that's all. Human nature's much the same. And the girl will make an excellent wife. She's of good family—a very sweet creature. Max adores her. He's weak, but his instincts are sound.

JACK. There is the question, of course, whether I am entitled to interfere. I acted on impulse. I am only a savage, a barbarian—what do I know of the aristocratic code of honour?

LADY WESTERBY. I thought there was only one code. And in any case—I don't see why this child should be made to suffer. . . .

JACK. Poor thing, poor thing, I am terribly sorry for her. . . . But after all, *will* she suffer so much?

LADY WESTERBY [*sinking her voice*]. Her story is my story. . . .

JACK. Yours!

LADY WESTERBY. Yes, mine. Don't you know?

JACK. I had merely heard vague rumours——

LADY WESTERBY. The name I bear is that of a dear old man who married me ten years ago. He died, and left me his money. That whitewashed me. But . . . in the years before, I had known very great suffering.

JACK. Had you no friends?

LADY WESTERBY. What friends has a woman? She has disgraced herself, her own sex shrinks from her; yours—offers only one kind of assistance.

JACK. That's true enough.

LADY WESTERBY. I struggled through; but, in those days, I vowed that if I got back I would never say no to a woman.

JACK. Lady Westerby, hitherto I've met you with the others, just like the others——

LADY WESTERBY. Why not? I don't go about blowing horns, or predicting the end of the world. But I do what I can.

JACK. I have tried, too. But only in the East End. Here, with these people, this cotton-wool set, one's afraid to speak above a whisper. The great thing is to have the right number of buttons to your coat. They regard me as a Barnum freak. I am like Gulliver among the Brobdingnagians.

LADY WESTERBY. The Lilliputians, I should have said. You have more than once come across lions in the forest, I suppose, Mr Frobisher?

JACK. Not in Australia! but I have shot big game in my time.

LADY WESTERBY. And lions are alarming beasts?

JACK. Very.

LADY WESTERBY. And yet, when their skin is stretched on the carpet, a child will run over it, without fear! Don't think me impertinent. . . .

JACK. What would you have a lion do in a drawing-room?

LADY WESTERBY. Roar! and those who are afraid shall fall on their faces! Oh, I should like to speak out my heart to you!

JACK. Do: I have need of a friend to-day.

LADY WESTERBY. Yes; I *am* your friend; I am glad that you know it. And being your friend, I will ask what it is has chained you, put you in a cage, you who led men? What has become of your strength, your will, and your power?

JACK. I am not alone. I have others to consider——

LADY WESTERBY. You are a man—there are not many! and the man must rule.

JACK. If I let myself go I should break things.

LADY WESTERBY. There can be too much safety-valve—oh, I speak what I know! There can be too much velvet glove—if the iron hand never is felt it might as well not be there! Why, is it Lord Steventon who stays you? One breath from you, and all that is left is a wig and a corset. Is it your wife? I love Alethea. She is good to the core, but she requires guidance.

JACK. Guidance! I——

LADY WESTERBY. Mr Frobisher, Mr Frobisher, we women cry out at tyranny, but in our hearts we admire the tyrant. They call us complex, we are as elementary as the tide beneath the moon. Govern us, we cry to our husbands—and if you do, we scratch, but our soul is at peace. Alethea is your fit mate, but she doesn't know you. How should she? To-day you must decide. Which will you be—the Man of Queensland or the Gentleman of Mayfair?

JACK. The Man of Queensland, by God! Lady Westerby, you are right! I will stand by the girl and Max. That's settled. [LADY WESTERBY *rises.*] I would like to see her——

LADY WESTERBY. Come with me. At once—why not? It's only two seconds——

JACK. That will be best. Let us go.

[*They are moving towards the door, when it opens and* ALETHEA *comes in.*

ALETHEA. I'm sorry to have stayed so long! I am like the Sabine women, trying to make peace between husband and father. You are not going?

LADY WESTERBY. Yes, Alethea. I came only on an errand of mercy. You'll explain, Mr Frobisher. I shall wait for you downstairs.

[*She goes.*

JACK. I'm going with her to see Miss Merton.

ALETHEA. Miss Merton! Why?

JACK. She is staying with Lady Westerby. She has no friends and no home.

ALETHEA. Why should *you* go?

JACK. I must see her—to settle what had best be done. On my return I will tell you what I have decided.

ALETHEA [*acidly*]. What you have—decided?

JACK. Yes. [*He looks steadily at her—and goes.*

[ALETHEA *sits at the piano, and plays a wild and violent air.* LUCY *comes from the inner room, pirouetting. She peers at* ALETHEA, *who takes no notice, and goes on playing.*

LUCY.

"Every wife and every husband
Now and then have little jars:
It will be the same in Greenland,
As no doubt it is in Mars."

Ally!

ALETHEA [*over her shoulder*]. What?

LUCY. Big row? Great battle on the—Yalu?

ALETHEA. Oh, really, there are times when he is too—exasperating!

LUCY. You have the sweet resource of music—you were thumping the piano as though it were Jack. What *is* all this trouble about Max?

ALETHEA. He wants him to—never mind! You're too young!

LUCY [*sitting*]. Ally, you *do* play the elder sister over me, just because you were born two or three years before, don't you?

ALETHEA. I'm very vexed, I tell you; very, *very* vexed.

[*She starts playing again.*

LUCY. This is a very bad example to set before a young girl who is thinking of marrying Hankey-Pankey.

"'Will you be mine?' asks Hankey-Pankey.
I shall bow, and murmur 'Thanky!'"

[*She rises and goes to* ALETHEA.

What *has* Max done?

ALETHEA [*over her shoulder*]. I told you to be quiet.

LUCY. I suppose it's all about Miss Merton? A case of—*cherchez*—Miss Merton!

ALETHEA. Lucy! *Will* you leave off?

LUCY. I am twenty—and on the eve of being engaged. And besides I've flirted—very—seriously—with Wilfred. But then it's jolly to know that one can go on flirting after one's married.

ALETHEA [*discontentedly*]. Lucy! Lucy! if Mamma heard you!

LUCY. Don't preach, there's a good girl. I was only thinking of Mr Dallas.

ALETHEA. Mr Dallas? You don't imagine that I——

LUCY. That you flirt with him! Heavens, no! Only mine shall be Wilfred, that's all.

ALETHEA [*rising*]. Lucy, I hate all this talk, and you know it. Mr Dallas amuses me, and one has to be amused. And please don't vex me to-day. I'm angry enough, I can tell you. If you knew how Jack has behaved! Oh, it's shameful—shameful!

[*She sits at the piano again, and plays more violently than ever.* SIMPSON *comes in with* DALLAS, *whom he announces.* ALETHEA *merely nods to him and goes on playing.*

LUCY. Talk of the—— How are you, Mr Dallas? Don't interrupt Alethea! She's improvising.

DALLAS [*sitting, after a glance at* ALETHEA]. Good afternoon, Lady Lucy. You enjoyed yourself last night?

LUCY. You only gave me one dance.

DALLAS. I was conscious of my audacity in demanding even that one.

LUCY. You were so conscious of your audacity that I nearly—had—to—wait.

DALLAS. My partner took such a long time swallowing her ice.

LUCY. Not so long as I shall take swallowing your excuse. But, then, the women all run after you, don't they?

DALLAS [*bowing—sits beside her*]. It pleases her ladyship to be satirical.

LUCY. Mr Dallas, will you be good enough, in a few well-chosen words, to give me your opinion of our sex?

DALLAS. I need only one word: Exquisite.

LUCY. That's rather like the mugs they used to give me, with "A present from Margate" stamped on them.

ALETHEA [*over her shoulder, still playing*]. Lucy!

LUCY. Dear me—she heard! [*To* DALLAS] But, then, I suppose you keep all your clever sayings for married women?

DALLAS. I'm afraid I have no clever sayings, Lady Lucy. I am a plain, unvarnished man——

LUCY [*rising*]. The varnish is all right! But I'm just a little disappointed, Mr Dallas.

DALLAS. I am sorry.

LUCY. You have the reputation, you know, of being such a lady-killer. But then I suppose I'm more exacting, being so young, and had better retire to the nursery. Unless you *very* much want me to stop?

DALLAS. It pains me, of course, to know that I'm not satisfactory.

LUCY [*passing*]. I am indeed sorry I cannot accept your pressing invitation to remain with you. Good afternoon, Mr—Illusion [*with a sweeping curtsey*].

[*She goes.* DALLAS, *after a moment, advances to* ALETHEA, *who seems lost in her music.*

DALLAS. How angry you are!

ALETHEA [*leaving the piano*]. How do you know I am angry?

DALLAS. I know all your moods.

ALETHEA [*rising*]. Yes, I am very vexed. But don't let us speak of it. Have you had tea?

DALLAS. Thanks. Why were you vexed?

ALETHEA. Oh, heaps of things. I'm glad you've come. Very.

DALLAS. Is the ogre out?

ALETHEA. I've told you not to call my husband an ogre. But you may to-day.

DALLAS. Then it is he who has vexed you?

ALETHEA. Of course—who else? He's like all husbands, I suppose—they're an impossible race.

DALLAS. You have my profoundest sympathy.

ALETHEA. It's a silly world, isn't it? You may smoke, if you like. Give me one of your cigarettes. [*He does so.*

ALETHEA. You'll find a match over there. [*He strikes a match, and rests his hand against hers as he holds the match for her.*] Don't. I've told you before that you mustn't be foolish.

DALLAS. Alethea——

ALETHEA. I've told you before that you mustn't call me by my Christian name. But you may to-day. Only to-day, remember.

DALLAS. Alethea.

ALETHEA. Well, go on.

DALLAS. Alethea.

ALETHEA. You're really not a parrot, you know.

DALLAS. It's only that I like to linger on the name.

ALETHEA. It's a stupid, stiff, angular, and unromantic one.

DALLAS. It's yours.

ALETHEA. "A poor thing, but my own." Well? Have you nothing more to say?

DALLAS. A great deal.

ALETHEA. Then say it, please. I'm cross to-day—I want to be amused. I enjoyed my dances with you last night. I believe you to be a thoroughly unprincipled person, but you dance divinely.

DALLAS. You must not believe all that's said against me.

ALETHEA. I don't. I only believe half. But that's quite enough.

DALLAS. My sister is no friend of mine, I know.

ALETHEA. Guin merely shrugs her shoulders at you.

DALLAS. We have never been in sympathy——

ALETHEA. She's a good woman, and you're not a good man. But then you don't pretend to be—and that's something.

DALLAS. I find the world a very pleasant place; and the little sins are more attractive to me than the little duties.

ALETHEA. They're better dressed, you know—duties are dowdy.

DALLAS. Have you no little sins?

ALETHEA. No. I am ridiculously good.

DALLAS. As your physician, I advise you to change your diet. Has it never struck you how complacently old people—*good* old people—refer to the follies of their youth? Just as we tell tales of our school-days. They whacked us for them at school.

ALETHEA. I was never whacked. I was even good at school. I shall have nothing to think of when I'm old.

DALLAS. Alethea . . .

ALETHEA. When I allowed you to call me by my Christian name I did not suggest that you should do scales on it. Have you nothing to say?

DALLAS. I am saying many things to you, and you know it.

ALETHEA. Wireless telegraphy? I feel no shock. No, thank you, my hand's quite comfortable where it is. Be bright—you can, sometimes. I tell you, I'm dull!

DALLAS. What shall I talk about?

ALETHEA. I'm not a professor, giving out a subject for an essay.

DALLAS. There is one thing I have at heart——

ALETHEA [*laughing lightly*]. How cramped it must be, poor dear!

DALLAS. You think I have no heart?

ALETHEA. You know, you're becoming monotonous. Oh, I'm not in luck to-day!

DALLAS. Why do you keep me at arm's length?

ALETHEA. We are entitled by Act of Parliament to so many cubic feet of air—and I have never measured the precise length of my arm.

DALLAS. I could suggest a pleasant employment for it.

ALETHEA. That is impertinent.

DALLAS. One's imagination is never polite. How adorable you are!

ALETHEA. And they call *you* a brilliant conversationalist!

DALLAS. No woman is vexed to be told she is adorable.

ALETHEA. Dear me, I'm not vexed. I simply am bored. I don't care two straws whether I am adorable or not. I want to be amused.

DALLAS. I am serious to-day.

ALETHEA. I prefer you when you are flippant. Do you know, you remind me of the topsy-turvy house at the Paris Exhibition?

DALLAS. Why?

ALETHEA. Because your head is in your heels—you dance so well and you think so badly.

DALLAS. Do you know what I think?

ALETHEA. Oh, yes, you are a philanderer—you are always wanting to make love.

DALLAS. There you wrong me.

ALETHEA. I met a woman once who loved you.

DALLAS. Does that seem so strange?

ALETHEA. Well, frankly, it does—to me.

DALLAS. Alethea!

ALETHEA. You've got it quite pat by now. You know, if I had been a man, I should be just like you.

DALLAS. You could pay me no higher compliment.

ALETHEA. You're easily satisfied. We're only scum, we two.

DALLAS. Scum! Oh!

ALETHEA. Or call it froth. The man I loved must do something, be something——

DALLAS. Like your husband?

ALETHEA. He comes nearer to it than any man I know.

DALLAS. He!

ALETHEA. But, with your permission, we will not discuss my husband. We are talking of you: and the man *I* should have been. *I* should have gone about telling women I loved them, and laughing that they should be such fools as to believe me; *I* should have been vicious, and made fun of everything——

DALLAS. You are not painting me in very glowing colours.

ALETHEA [*nodding*]. We know, you and I. We are twins.

DALLAS [*passionately*]. I love you.

ALETHEA [*lightly*]. Well, that of course is a pity.

DALLAS. I've never spoken before—I didn't intend to to-day—I've been content to be merely your friend——

ALETHEA. That was very good of you.

DALLAS. But now things have happened. I don't know what—I don't care. But I see *he* has hurt you, and I love you! Don't let us pretend any longer! Do you think I don't know that he bought you, as he'd buy a bale of wool——

ALETHEA. Mr Dallas! [*Haughtily*] Had I been a man, Mr Dallas, I should not have been so foolish as to show my contempt for the woman I was making love to——

DALLAS. Contempt! Alethea!

[*Losing all self-control, he rushes wildly to her and seizes her in his arms.* JACK'S *voice is heard outside.*

ALETHEA [*struggling*]. You fool! Let me go! Let me go—let me go! [*At the door*] How dare you!

[*She breaks from him, and rushes into the inner room. The door has scarcely closed upon her when* JACK *comes in.* DALLAS *is unable to regain his self-command, and for a moment the two men are eyeing each other.*

DALLAS [*with an effort*]. Lady Alethea has just left me.

JACK [*with rigid composure*]. Ah!

DALLAS. I was going . . .

JACK. Good-bye. [DALLAS *goes hastily.*

[JACK *rings.* SIMPSON *comes in.*

JACK. Her ladyship is not at home to Mr Dallas in future.

SIMPSON. Very well, sir. [*He goes.*

[*The inner door opens, and* ALETHEA *appears. She is evidently frightened, and ill at ease, though she affects perfect calm.*

ALETHEA. Well, Jack—what have you settled about Max?

JACK [*after long glance at her*]. We will discuss that another time.

[*He turns on his heel and goes, leaving* ALETHEA *puzzled and distressed.*

## ACT III

*The scene is the same as in the previous Act.*

LUCY *is coiled on the sofa, reading.* ALETHEA *comes in.* LUCY *looks up.*

LUCY. Hullo, Ally? Jack back yet?

ALETHEA. No . . .

[*She moves to the fireplace—then down to the window.*

LUCY. I *was* surprised to see him go off with Hankey-Pankey last night!

ALETHEA [*nervously*]. He said nothing more?

LUCY. Only what I told you. He was going to be late, had to be up early, and would sleep at the club.

ALETHEA. It's very strange. . . . How was he?

LUCY. Funny.

ALETHEA. How funny?

LUCY. Well, not in a jovial way There was a frown on him all the time that sets one's teeth on edge.

ALETHEA. Did he leave you and Mr Bannister alone at all?

LUCY. Yes, but only because we bored him, I think. He had letters to write, he said. And I played to my little man, and sang to him, and he was in heaven. I dressed the part prettily, I think—I wore white muslin.

ALETHEA. White muslin?

LUCY. You see, it needed some study. He hasn't met a woman for fifteen years or so, and highly refined creatures like us can't be appreciated right off. So I did my Jane Austen.

ALETHEA [*discontentedly*]. Ah!

LUCY. Yes—I was all muslin and innocence. I was peeping into the world from behind a rose-bush. Oh, I can tell you I am rather pleased with myself!

ALETHEA. I hate to hear you talk like this!

LUCY [*very surprised, half raising herself on her elbow*]. What *do* you mean?

ALETHEA [*turning away*]. Don't speak as though you hadn't any heart or feeling. . . .

LUCY. Upon my word!

ALETHEA. Oh, I haven't set much of an example to you, I know. But, after all——

LUCY. After all, what? Don't you want me to marry Mr Bannister?

ALETHEA. Yes—if you're fond of him.

LUCY. He's not so bad.

ALETHEA [*coming down to her*]. Oh, don't make yourself out so horrid!

LUCY. Horrid! [*She turns.*] Are *you* going to give me a lecture?

ALETHEA [*sitting beside* LUCY]. Oh, look here—we've been badly brought up, we two, I know—but we've always cared for each other——

LUCY. What's up, Ally?

ALETHEA. Nothing—what should be—why? Only I feel—don't you see—I'm responsible, somehow. I'm the elder sister. I've only shown you my frivolous side—and that's been wrong, I suppose. I *did* love Jack when I married him——

LUCY. Of course you did. Well?

ALETHEA. You're only a child—what do you know about things? I've made fun of Jack and all that—but I tell you—the fact is—— Hark! Was that he? No. . . . Ah, well—so it's all right with you and Mr Bannister?

LUCY [*nodding*]. He's coming this afternoon; and if I like——

ALETHEA. He has only seen you twice——

LUCY. That's all. It *is* a bit sudden. But he's so unsophisticated that any girl could snap him up at once. And somebody's sure to tell him about Wilfred—and I'd rather be engaged first.

ALETHEA. Why not tell him yourself?

LUCY. That's not a bad idea.

ALETHEA. Be frank with him—say what there is to say. I like his face—I'm sure he's an honest man. Though he must be that, of course, as he's a friend of Jack's.

LUCY [*meditatively*]. A bit of a bore, I fancy.

ALETHEA [*earnestly*]. Don't speak like that of the man you mean to marry! [LUCY *leans over and passes her hand across* ALETHEA'S *shoulder.*] What are you doing?

LUCY. Looking for the wings. They must be sprouting somewhere.

ALETHEA. Lucy, I've had a shock.

LUCY. Shock?

ALETHEA. Oh, never mind how—it's nothing, of course—but it has made me think. Oh, I wish I hadn't gone out last night!

LUCY. Did you lose?

ALETHEA. No—I had wonderful luck. Only I hate the game. I don't mean to play any more.

LUCY. I fancy I've heard that already.

ALETHEA. Oh, they are such sharks, those women! The Duchess made a revoke—she did it on purpose, of course—and I found it out, and there was quite a scene. And Gladys and Tiny were fighting all the evening. Poor Tiny, I'm sorry for her. But I've had enough of it.

LUCY. H'm!

ALETHEA. Oh, I mean it! I shan't play any more. I'm going to lead a different life altogether.

LUCY. You should see a doctor, my dear—it may be measles.

ALETHEA. Don't be silly—I'm in earnest. And I want you . . . to be different too. You're a very good girl—all this is only pretence. You must like Mr Bannister, or I'm sure you wouldn't marry him.

LUCY. I like him well enough, but I'd marry him anyway.

ALETHEA. I know you better.

LUCY. You'd have married Mr Dallas if he had been rich——

ALETHEA. Dallas! Ah, that reminds me—— [*She rings—as she passes the sofa she takes up* LUCY'S *book.*] Tennyson! You reading poetry!

LUCY [*calmly*]. Hankey-Pankey's coming.

ALETHEA [*discontentedly*]. Ah. . . . [JAMES *comes in.*] I'm not at home to Mr Dallas in future.

JAMES. I know, my lady. [LUCY *looks up.*

ALETHEA. What do you mean?

JAMES. Mr Frobisher told me yesterday——

ALETHEA. Ah—very well—all right—yes—very well—— [JAMES *goes.*

LUCY. Hullo! What's up?

ALETHEA [*very perturbed*]. I thought I told you not to bother.

LUCY. Why won't you see Dallas any more, and why did Jack——

ALETHEA. Be quiet—leave me alone.

[LUCY *has risen and has gone up to her*—ALETHEA *turns away.*

LUCY. Ally!

ALETHEA. I'm going to the nursery.

LUCY. Shall I go with you?

ALETHEA. No.

[*She goes off.* LUCY *looks after her, very puzzled; then goes back to her sofa and coils herself up again.* JAMES *comes in, with the* MARQUIS.

MARQUIS [*hurriedly*]. Ah, Lucy—where's Alethea?

LUCY. Will you tell her ladyship, James? She has just gone through to the nursery.

JAMES. Yes, my lady.

[*He goes. The* MARQUIS *walks angrily up and down.*

LUCY [*from her sofa*]. It's all right with Hankey-Pankey, Papa.

MARQUIS. And who may Hankey-Pankey be?

LUCY. Your new son-in-law, Mr Bannister.

MARQUIS. What! Really! Already!

LUCY. He's head over heels. I'm expecting him now.

MARQUIS [*beaming*]. And you think that he——

LUCY. Oh, yes. Alethea says it's too sudden.

MARQUIS. Not at all, not at all. That's very good. Admirable. I've made inquiries—he's enormously rich. I congratulate you, my child. [*He bends over her and kisses her.*] Admirable.

LUCY. Alethea suggests I should tell about Wilfred.

MARQUIS. Nonsense, nonsense! Wilfred! A boy and girl friendship! Wilfred belongs to the past, the skipping-rope age. Not a word about Wilfred!

LUCY. The poor boy'll be awfully cut up.

MARQUIS. Pooh, pooh! It's good training for boys. Oh, I'm very glad, very! You'll send Mr Bannister to me, of course. I wish I had only had daughters!

LUCY. Anything fresh about Max, Papa?

MARQUIS [*in sudden fury*]. Max? Ah, Max! [*He stalks up and down the room.* ALETHEA *comes in.*] Alethea! What does this mean?

ALETHEA. What, Papa?

MARQUIS. Don't you know?

ALETHEA. Why, what is there to know?

MARQUIS. He hasn't told you? Is it possible? You didn't know that Max is gone?

ALETHEA. Gone! Where?

MARQUIS. To ruin—perdition—to the devil! As for me, I cast him off—he is no longer a son of mine.

LUCY. Why, Papa, what has he done?

MARQUIS. He has had the exquisite courtesy to inform me what he has done. He has *married* this—Merton woman.

ALETHEA. Max married!!

MARQUIS. And I am actually to understand that you didn't know?

LUCY. She hasn't seen Jack yet——

MARQUIS. Yet? What do you mean?

LUCY. He slept at the club last night.

MARQUIS. He slept at the club! Since when do you allow your husband to sleep at the club?

ALETHEA [*confused*]. I was playing bridge at Lady Parchester's—he left a message with Lucy——

MARQUIS. Ah! I see that Mr Frobisher and I must have an explanation on more points than one!

ALETHEA. You had better leave Jack alone. I am sorry about Max, of course—but Jack has done what he thought right——

MARQUIS [*thundering*]. What he thought right! Listen to her! What Mr Frobisher thought right! So I am to allow myself to be dictated to by this *parvenu* from the Australian backwoods!

ALETHEA. That is not the way to speak of my husband.

MARQUIS. Not the way, by Gad! I will show him the way. Your husband yokes my son to—to this creature—and sends him to cut the wool off mangy sheep—and you stand by and approve!

ALETHEA. I did what I could—I tried. But Jack felt very strongly——

MARQUIS. Ha, ha, ha! Because of Mr Frobisher's strong feeling my son must disgrace himself, and his name!

ALETHEA. Max is twenty-five, after all——

MARQUIS. He was helpless; he had no money. I left the affair in your hands. If a wife has not sufficient influence over her husband——

ALETHEA. Papa, I won't be worried like this. I told you I'd try; and I did try. But Jack's not a child——

MARQUIS [*raging*]. No; he's a fool, an ass, an imbecile——

ALETHEA. I won't allow you to say such things. I won't stay here and have my husband abused. I'm going to baby.

[*She goes, leaving the* MARQUIS *quite bewildered.*

MARQUIS. What does this mean?

LUCY. I don't know. Something has happened.

MARQUIS. Rubbish! What can have happened?

LUCY. She has been very strange—I don't know——

MARQUIS. He must have bewitched her! Why, he sees with her eyes—he has always done what she told him. Well, we'll have a few words, he and I; and I venture to predict that Mr Frobisher will wish that he had never been born! [JAMES *comes in.*

JAMES. Mr Bannister has called, my lady.

LUCY. Show him up, James. [*He goes.*

MARQUIS. I had better go—it would look rather marked if he found me here. I can get to the nursery through the billiard-room, can't I?

LUCY. Yes.

MARQUIS. Very well, then—I'll go to Alethea—and come back later, for a little talk with my friend Frobisher. Good luck to you, my child! [*He goes.*

[LUCY *sits. After a moment* JAMES *comes in with* HANKEY BANNISTER.

JAMES. Mr Bannister. [*He goes.*

LUCY. How do you do? [*They shake hands.*] Won't you sit down?

HANKEY [*sitting*]. Thank you. Have I disturbed you? You were reading?

LUCY. Yes. Tennyson.

HANKEY [*sitting beside her*]. Ah! Tennyson. Yes, I know—he was a poet. You are fond of poetry?

LUCY. Oh, yes!

HANKEY [*with a sigh*]. I mean to be, you know—in time. But at present I'm a shockingly ignorant person. You mustn't despise me for it.

LUCY. Despise you! Why do you persist in depreciating yourself?

HANKEY. You see, I know nothing of the kind of things that people here know and talk about. I've read no books to speak of. I went out to Australia when I was a nipper; I had only been at school for a couple of years. Every one here's most awfully clever. The only thing *I* know is the earth.

LUCY. The earth?

HANKEY. When you've lived in the open, you see, as I've done, these great many years—digging and digging and praying the earth to be kind, and help you—why, you get to know one another, as it were—you're no longer a stranger.

LUCY. Mother earth, the poets all call her.

HANKEY [*smiling*]. Yes—and she was a hard mother to me—until eighteen months ago. Oh, I shall never forget that day! I had lost my nerve—I had been alone for so long—cold and hungry, drenched to the skin—it hadn't stopped raining for weeks. And the ravens seemed to be drawing nearer and nearer. And I lay in my tent there, and cried like a fool, and prayed—to the earth, you know—I was almost a pagan. And—you won't believe it, perhaps, but it's true—almost that very moment the rain stopped and the sun came out, and I set to work—I dug on the very spot where I had been kneeling—and I turned up a nugget! A nugget of virgin gold!

LUCY. Really!

HANKEY [*nodding*]. She had heard my prayers, and was sorry. I call it the Good Earth Mine.

LUCY [*smiling*]. So you see you're a bit of a poet yourself.

HANKEY. There are not many men would say *that* of me! But we all have a side—don't you think—that we show, just once in a lifetime. . . . Would it take long, Lady Lucy, d'you fancy, to lick a rough creature like me into shape?

LUCY. I don't know that you need it. The men I meet can't speak of the earth.

HANKEY. Ah, they've got the ways, you see—they know how to do things. I'm only a lubber. But I mean to try very hard.

LUCY. You'll soon pick up the outside veneer and polish.

HANKEY. That's it—I'm only rough wood—a bit of stout ash that's been exposed to all weathers; but though it's gnarled and ugly, it'll stand a strain better than mahogany. It's the stuff to build bridges of.

LUCY. That's a pretty idea. . . .

HANKEY [*eagerly*]. And you think we two could be friends, Lady Lucy?

LUCY. I fancy we're that already.

HANKEY. You mean it?

LUCY. Oh, yes, I'm not a doll—I know a man when I see one.

HANKEY [*moves chair*]. Yes, you could go tiger-hunting with me—I'll say that. I'm staunch—it's not much to brag about—but it's all I've got.

LUCY. It's a good deal.

HANKEY. I'm not a gentleman, worse luck—and I guess it's presumption in me—but Jack must have been much the same when he first came over?

LUCY. Oh, yes, just the same.

HANKEY. Well, he's picked up the lingo, hasn't he? He speaks like a duke, he does—he's got the standoffish manner. When I knew him out there he was just a rough chap like me—though that's a good many years ago. But I tell you, Lady Lucy—— [JACK *comes in.*

LUCY. Ah, Jack!

HANKEY. Cuss!

JACK. Good afternoon, Lucy. How are you, Jim?

LUCY [*rising and putting her arm through* JACK'S]. We were just speaking of you. By the way, Papa's been here. He's very angry with you.

JACK. Really?

LUCY. Yes. About Max and Miss Merton. I'm very pleased myself—I like her. Papa says that when he's finished with you you'll wish you had never been born!

JACK [*carelessly*]. You alarm me. [*He sits.*

LUCY [*rising*]. That's what you call his standoffish manner, isn't it, Mr Bannister? I'll tell Alethea you're here, Jack.

[*She goes to the door.*

HANKEY [*eagerly*]. Shall I see you before I go, Lady Lucy?

LUCY. Oh, yes, if you wish it. I shall be on the premises.

[*She goes off.*

HANKEY. Jack, old pal, Jack! I think it's all right!

JACK. What's all right?

HANKEY. What! *It!* Say a kind word to a fellow! I believe that she'll have me. Confound you, if you hadn't come in just then——

JACK. You'd have proposed?

HANKEY. That's so—I would, and I will, too, before I leave this house.

JACK. Mad Jim, Mad Jim! You only met her two days ago.

HANKEY. I know her as well as I should in twenty years. I'm an old miner—I can tell gold when I see it, first time.

JACK [*after a moment's silence and meditation*]. Look here, you've done one or two things for me, in my time, that I haven't forgotten. When I had the bush fever you stuck by me or I shouldn't be here. And the question is now—what ought I to do?

HANKEY. Do? What do you mean?

JACK. You're in love with Lucy?

HANKEY [*sturdily*]. Yes, I am.

JACK. And you think she loves you?

HANKEY. She likes me, I know—and the rest will come. Oh, I'll make a good husband! I'll only live for her.

JACK. That's just it—you'd do what I did. Damn it, look here—we're a couple of men, we two, and not mere snivelling idiots. Anyone else I wouldn't care—I'd say it wasn't my business. But you—well, with you it's different.

HANKEY. If you've anything to say, say it out. I can stand it.

JACK. When a girl who's been brought up as she's been brought up marries a man from a mining-camp, she marries him for his money.

HANKEY. Lucy wouldn't—she's not that sort.

JACK. Bah!

HANKEY. You were the same as me when her sister married you——

JACK. Yes, I was—that's just it. And . . . well—look here: Lucy's twenty-one. D'you think a girl reaches that age without falling in love?

HANKEY. She's had her flirtations, no doubt.

JACK. Oh, yes, they don't count. But she *was* in love—is to this day—with her cousin, Wilfred Renton. Oh, yes, he's only an amiable ass, of the pretty kind, and it may be mere boy and girl nonsense, and all that; but if he had a few thousands a year she'd take him to-morrow, and it's right you should know.

HANKEY. In love with her cousin?

JACK. I've told you. Of the depth of her feeling I've of course no idea. *Have* women like her any deep feeling? I don't know. But there it is.

HANKEY. I've been a fool.

JACK. I was just such another—but I had no friend to tell me. You're tremendously rich—a great catch—and her noble father is poor. I feel a bit of a brute at giving the girl away, but you'd hear it from twenty people—the thing isn't a secret.

HANKEY. And you believe that she'd marry me . . . notwithstanding?

JACK. In this set they think a great deal of money.

HANKEY. Her sister loved you.

JACK. I should have held my tongue, very likely, if my marriage had turned out well. I was ass enough to believe that I had been married for love. That illusion didn't last long—I don't think it to-day.

HANKEY. . . . In love with her cousin!

JACK. Ask her yourself—tell her just what I've said. Mind you, she's a very sweet girl. She's frivolous, of course—she lives on the surface of things—and God only knows whether she ever yet really has learned what the word love truly means! Still, there it is—and you know what you ought to know. The rest just concerns yourself.

[*There is silence.* HANKEY *staring before him.* JAMES *comes in, goes to* JACK, *and whispers in his ear.*

JAMES. Mr Dallas has called sir,—he is writing a letter to her ladyship.

JACK. Ah, very well . . . when he's done say I particularly want to see him. And bring up the letter too. You understand?

JAMES. Yes, sir. [*He goes.*

HANKEY. Dallas, Lady Westerby's brother?

JACK. That's the best thing about him! Jim, I want your help. There's the devil unchained in me to-day, and I don't want to throttle the man. So you stand by.

HANKEY. What has he done?

JACK. He'll tell us what he has done.

[FOOTMAN *enters. There is a moment's wait, then* SIMPSON *comes in with* DALLAS, *whom he announces.* FOOTMAN *and* SIMPSON *go.*

DALLAS [*vaguely surprised*]. Ah, how d'you do? . . . You wanted to speak to me?

JACK. Yes. Let me introduce you—Mr Dallas—Mr Bannister.

[*They bow stiffly,* HANKEY *goes up. Enter* JAMES *with letter, which he hands to* JACK *and then goes.*

DALLAS. Sorry to find Lady Alethea's out—I've just written a line to her.

JACK. Ah!

DALLAS. You'll see that it's given to her, won't you?

JACK. Oh, yes—I'll give it myself.

DALLAS. Thanks. [*Pause.*] Er—you all right?

JACK. Quite. And you?

DALLAS. A bit fagged—late hours are telling. You going to Ascot?

JACK. I don't think so. By the way, touching this letter——

DALLAS. The letter?

JACK. Yes, I'm rather curious to know what you've written.

DALLAS. What! You don't mean to open it!

JACK. Oh, no. But you will.

DALLAS. What!!!

JACK. You'll be good enough to read to me what you have written.

DALLAS [*forcing a laugh*]. Do you do me the honour to be jealous?

JACK. I'm rather in a hurry.

DALLAS. My dear chap——

JACK. Quite so—open the envelope, please. [*He hands him the letter.*

[DALLAS *makes a swift movement as though to tear it;* JACK *seizes him by the wrist;* HANKEY *moves down and stands beside* JACK.

JACK. All right, Jim. Look here, I'm a bit of a savage—but—[*releases* DALLAS' *hand*]—you'd better read me that letter.

DALLAS. I've not the slightest objection. [*Slowly opens the envelope.*] Don't you think this person might withdraw? Or do you keep him here for your protection?

JACK. No. For yours.

DALLAS. That's exceedingly kind of you.

[*He begins to read.* HANKEY *stands behind him.*

DALLAS. "Dear Lady Alethea——"

HANKEY. I don't see the "Lady." [JACK *and* DALLAS *turn sharply.*

DALLAS. "We're very old friends—I hope you'll——"

JACK. Read it, Jim. [HANKEY *takes letter.*

HANKEY. "I hope you will forgive what I said to you yesterday. I must have been mad, but I am glad that you know. Harry."

JACK [*to* HANKEY]. Thank you, Jim. Put it on the table. [*He turns to* DALLAS.] Mr Dallas, you can go.

DALLAS. Before I go, I must——

JACK. You can go. I have to remember that you're in my house.

[*For a moment they stand face to face;* DALLAS *suddenly swings on his heel and goes.*

HANKEY. By Jove, that man's in luck! I'm afraid I should have had a go at him——

JACK. If we had been in Queensland!

HANKEY. His letter at least clears your wife——

JACK. Clears her! Do you think I ever doubted her? No, no, no. But that's what it is, you see; that frog is allowed to call her by her Christian name, to speak of his filthy love. It's for garbage like Dallas that everything else is shelved. For creatures like him!

[JACK *sits at table.*

[*The* MARQUIS *comes in.*

MARQUIS. Ah, my dear Mr Bannister, I'm delighted to see you. How are you? [*Shakes hands.*] Don't let me drive you away.

HANKEY. I was just going, my lord.

MARQUIS. You will find the ladies, or at least one of them, in the drawing-room.

HANKEY. I've a little business that I'm afraid I must attend to. Good afternoon, my lord. [*He goes abruptly.*

MARQUIS. Why, what's the matter with him?

JACK. Won't you sit down?

MARQUIS. What I have to say to you, sir, I would rather say standing. I am anxious to know whether it is a fact that my son has been married to-day?

JACK. Oh, yes—by special licence. I have lent the young couple my yacht for their honeymoon.

MARQUIS. Indeed?

JACK. The witnesses were Lady Westerby and myself; and you will be pleased to hear that the bride looked very handsome.

MARQUIS. That, of course, is most satisfactory. And you considered the consent of the parents, of the family, a mere trifle that might be entirely dispensed with?

JACK. Under the circumstances, I did venture so to consider.

MARQUIS. Admirable. Mr Frobisher, I am under an obligation to you for one or two loans, which I hope to be able promptly to discharge——

JACK. At your convenience.

MARQUIS. But I should be failing in my duty did I not take the earliest possible opportunity of informing you that your conduct in this affair has been of the last imbecility; of a dishonest stupidity so outrageous as to be scarcely conceivable in a chimpanzee. I would tell you further, sir——

JACK [*rising*]. You have a fine flow of eloquence, Lord Steventon, and have, on more than one occasion, favoured me at great length with your opinion on my behaviour. With your consent I propose to enlighten you as to what I think of your own.

MARQUIS. There is a difference between our stations, sir, that would render any such attempt indecent and impertinent.

JACK. I will run that risk. And though I am fully conscious of the exalted position you adorn, I will tell you that your action, in turning this innocent girl out of doors, disgraced, helpless, and friendless, was dastardly and criminal——

MARQUIS [*trembling with passion*]. Sir!!

JACK. And that your son, in marrying the woman he loves, and has wronged, makes no *mésalliance*, but acts like an honest gentleman——

MARQUIS. I am not here to receive a sermon from you, sir.

JACK. No; you expected to find me humble beneath your reproach. Those days are over. You have at least the satisfaction of knowing that your son is married to a very charming girl——

MARQUIS. Who is a stain on the family honour!

JACK. It seems to me that the less we say of the family honour the better.

MARQUIS. What!

JACK. Let the family honour turn honest, and it will rejoice at Lord Drayton's marriage——

MARQUIS. By Gad, sir!!

JACK. Believe me, Lord Steventon, the heir to your title will be far better employed earning his livelihood in Australia than sponging at home on snobs and *parvenus*! [*Enter* JAMES.

JAMES. Beg pardon, sir, Mr Peters is here, and says you want to see him at once.

JACK. Let him wait.

MARQUIS. Oh, no—he can come—I am going! [*Exit* JAMES.

MARQUIS. And in the future, I beg you to understand that I have not the honour of your acquaintance.

JACK. That will be as you wish.

MARQUIS. But, one last word—if, in your composition, you possessed one grain of gentlemanly feeling——

JACK. I should probably have been content to let Miss Merton be thrown, penniless, upon the streets of London. She, at least, is the gainer by my not being a gentleman!

[*The* MARQUIS *turns on his heel, and goes without a word. Enter* PETERS.

PETERS. Good morning, sir—I'm sorry I'm late—I came the moment I received your wire——

JACK. That's all right, Peters. I'm going back to Queensland——

PETERS. Sir!!!

JACK. And I want you to put all my property here on the market —this place, the house in Sussex, and the rest. You understand?

[*Enter* ALETHEA.

PETERS. Everything, sir? Furniture—— [*Sees* LADY ALETHEA.] Dear me! I'm—very well, sir—I'll see to it at once. And when could possession be given?

JACK. Say in a fortnight.

PETERS. A fortnight, sir?

JACK. Yes. So you'll lose no time. Good morning, Peters.

[PETERS *has bowed to* ALETHEA; *he stands a moment irresolute; then goes.*

ALETHEA. Why, Jack, what does this mean?

JACK. It means that we are going to Queensland by the next boat.

ALETHEA. To Queensland!

JACK. Yes. You and Archie and I.

ALETHEA. I don't understand——

JACK [*quietly*]. What is there to understand? The thing's very simple. By the way, there's a letter for you on the table.

ALETHEA. For me?

JACK. Yes. Mr Dallas brought it.

ALETHEA [*taking the letter*]. It has been opened——

JACK. He was good enough to open it himself, and read me what he had written.

ALETHEA [*with a quick look at him*]. Ah—— [*She reads the letter, tears it up scornfully, and throws it away.*] Jack, when you came in yesterday——

JACK. We needn't refer to that——

ALETHEA [*eagerly*]. But we must! I'm afraid you thought—I don't know what you thought. I admit I was wrong about—that person. I have of course not the slightest desire ever to see him again. But that doesn't excuse your giving instructions to the servants——

JACK. You must pardon me if I regard it as an ample excuse.

ALETHEA. Why? You might have left that to me. Mr Dallas so far had never led me to expect——

JACK. I told you what sort of man he was, and you wouldn't believe me.

ALETHEA. I was wrong, I admit. But in future——

JACK. They don't breed men of his type in Queensland.

ALETHEA. Queensland! Why do you harp upon Queensland? You're not seriously asking me to go there?

JACK. Oh, yes; very seriously, I assure you.

ALETHEA [*gently*]. Jack, Jack, this is absurd! I was as indignant yesterday as you could have been; and I assure you it has taught me a lesson. In future . . .

JACK. It's too late for that now.

ALETHEA. Too late! But, good heavens, what have I done, after all? You talk of dragging me away, shutting me in a desert! Why?

JACK. The wife must go with her husband.

ALETHEA. I've had to remind you before that I'm not a mere chattel of yours.

JACK. Yes; you've told me that more than once.

ALETHEA. I can understand, of course, that you should be vexed—but you really are—much angrier—than you've any reason to be—— You don't think I cared about Dallas, or want to see him again? Come, let's be friends. . . .

[*She goes to him as though to kiss him; he waves her back, turns to his desk, sits, and takes up some papers.*

ALETHEA. You won't? Why, don't you see how silly you've been? You've kept away from me ever since this happened. You slept at the club last night—and that wasn't a nice thing to do—now was it? I couldn't believe that you really were not coming home—I stayed up a long time—I meant to tell you everything. I didn't go to bed till

past three—and then I couldn't sleep. Oh, it was unkind of you—yes, it was—very—— You stay away, and brood over things, and work yourself into a passion. Why? Don't you think *I* was angry? I told James myself to-day that I wouldn't see that tiresome man any more. Oh, don't look so fiercely at me, as though you were Othello and I Desdemona! Come, let's be friends. [*He turns and looks at her.*] What more can I do? Do you want me to go on my knees? I'm not used to pleading . . .

JACK [*grimly*]. I haven't asked you to plead.

ALETHEA [*mildly reproachful*]. This is scarcely what I should have expected of you . . .

JACK. No. I realize that. But things have changed, you see. I've endured a great deal, day after day. Now the end has come.

ALETHEA [*wondering*]. The end?

JACK. Yes.

ALETHEA. I don't know what you mean?

JACK. I would rather not say any more.

ALETHEA. But you must—we must have this out—— What instructions have you given to Peters?

JACK. To sell the lease of this house, and all that is in it.

ALETHEA. What? He may not have gone yet—perhaps we can stop him.

[*She runs to the bell*—JACK *laughs out loud; she turns and faces him.*

ALETHEA. You laugh?

JACK. It's too late for things to be stopped.

ALETHEA. Because of Mr Dallas?

JACK [*banging his fist on the desk*]. Oh, not Dallas alone. He was the last straw, that's all. It's the friends you have, and the life you lead, and the opinions you hold—it's time there should be a change.

ALETHEA. I don't know what you mean.

JACK [*with growing vehemence*]. I've had enough of these companions of yours, these wretched, sexless women who do nothing but flirt and gamble, these childless wives, who grudge the time that it costs them to bring a baby into the world. I've had enough of their brainless, indecent talk, where everything good is turned into ridicule, and each word has a double meaning. I've had enough of this existence of ours, in town and country, where all the men make love to their neighbours' wives. I've done with it—done with it all—and so have you.

ALETHEA. You exaggerate grossly.

JACK. Exaggerate! Haven't I had to stand by and see it all, year after year? Oh, yes, we've lived in a very smart set, and I dare say there've been one or two more who respected the seventh commandment, and merely played with fire. And most husbands, no doubt,

are content that their wives should neglect them, as you have neglected me—never give them a thought, have no time to look after their child——

ALETHEA [*indignantly*]. That's not true!

JACK. Isn't it? There's our boy upstairs—you allowed a strange woman to give him her milk, so that you could play bridge, and go dancing. You see him a few minutes each day—you've so much to do!

ALETHEA. Do you think I don't love my child?

JACK. You love him as you love me—for half an hour out of the twenty-four; and the rest of the time we don't count.

ALETHEA [*wringing her hands*]. Oh, how can you say such things!

JACK. As for me—the schemes I've at heart—my hopes and ambitions—it's a long time now that I've never dared speak of them. I've been poor, foolish Jack, who didn't play cards, or waltz; I was dull and a bore. But the first fop who came along, the first smirking dandy, who could whisper and ogle, and tell you a titbit of scandal, he was amusing and pleasant. He thought it right that you should lose hundreds at cards, spend a fortune on dress, and fritter your time on all sorts of foolishness. Your brother seduces a girl—you are indignant with me because I befriend her. The people around you—the poor, the helpless, the sick—to these you give never a thought. You're a peer's daughter, sent into the world to enjoy yourself, have a good time, with Dallases round you to flirt with. It's been pleasure, pleasure, pleasure, from morning till night, from one year's end to another. You and your friends forget for what purpose God made you, and turn to mere empty dolls. Well, I say, to hell with all this! You're my wife, not my mistress; I married because I wanted a mate and a partner, and I'm tired of the life we've led, in which you've been neither. And so we'll go, we two: we'll leave this rotten West End; we'll go back to nature, and start things over again!

ALETHEA [*defiant*]. I will not.

JACK. You won't?

ALETHEA. No, I won't. You have said things to me I will never forget. Why did I marry you, do you think?

JACK. Why? For my money.

ALETHEA [*with a cry of pain*]. Oh!

JACK. You knew Dallas before; you'd have married him if he had been rich. If I died to-morrow he'd be your next husband——

ALETHEA. Oh!

JACK. He or his like.

ALETHEA [*slowly*]. So that's what you think of me!

JACK. Yes; and it's true! You pretended to love me, in the first few days; but all that very soon wore off. You married me for my money—and God knows I've paid the price!

ALETHEA [*feverishly excited*]. Very well, then—if you go to Queensland, you go alone.

JACK. You refuse to come with me?

ALETHEA. Yes; I refuse; I refuse! Oh, Lucy, where's Lucy? I'll go home. I'll go back with her—I won't stay with you any more——

JACK. You won't come?

ALETHEA. Oh, never, never, never!

[*She has rushed to the door, and has called to* LUCY, *who now comes in, arm in arm with* HANKEY. ALETHEA *goes to her, and drags her away.*

ALETHEA. Lucy, Lucy, come with me, come!

LUCY [*amazed*]. Why, Ally!

ALETHEA. Come!

[ALETHEA *and* LUCY *go*—HANKEY *stares after them; and at* JACK, *who for a moment says nothing.*

JACK [*grimly*] You and Lucy——?

HANKEY. Yes—she has told me everything——

JACK. Quite so. Well, you wanted a house like this, and the rest—you'd better take them——

HANKEY. Why—what has happened?

JACK. I'm going to Queensland. [*He rings.*

HANKEY. And your wife?

JACK [*sitting at his desk, with his back turned*]. My wife stays here.

## ACT IV

LADY WESTERBY'S *drawing-room. Ten days have passed.* LADY WESTERBY, LADY PARCHESTER, *and* TINY *are seated, dallying with teacups.* HANNAFORD *stands behind tea-table.*

HANNAFORD [*standing*]. Well, ladies, I as a philosopher, surveying mankind from some slight elevation, I say it is well done.

TINY. Oh, Mr Hannaford!

HANNAFORD. The Australian returns to Australia, and the days of the Colonial Exhibition are over. Frobisher goes, but the fair Alethea remains to gladden our eyes, and her noble father has a new bannister to lean on.

TINY. I forgive the pun, but wince none the less. I wanted Mr Bannister for myself.

HANNAFORD. Miss Mornington, you make me constantly regret that I have not ten thousand a year.

TINY. With an epigrammatic husband I should require more than that.

HANNAFORD. Believe me, were I very rich, I should be as dull as a statesman. I scintillate because I am poor. I shine in the dark.

LADY PARCHESTER. Marry him, Tiny. On foggy days you can switch on Mr Hannaford.

HANNAFORD. Miss Mornington seeks a rich husband, and I a rich wife. We adore each other, but propose only to marry after the decease of our first partners.

LADY PARCHESTER. A post-mortem engagement. You'd make a delicious couple. I'd love to see it.

HANNAFORD. By the way, I met Lord Parchester in Bond Street, yesterday, dreamily gazing into a diamond shop. Is your ladyship contemplating a new tiara?

LADY PARCHESTER. I have a . . . morganatic relation who, I believe, has tastes that way.

HANNAFORD. Ah! One can scarcely call her your sister-in-law. The kinship is obscure.

LADY PARCHESTER. That also, like your wit, shines in the dark. Oh, lucky Alethea!

HANNAFORD. The Australian, I hear, has made most handsome settlements. Lord Steventon beams.

TINY. It's hard on Alethea that the boy should be taken away. I call it brutal.

HANNAFORD. The brutality of the male is the last survival of primitive honesty.

TINY. I fancy I've heard that before.

HANNAFORD. Miss Mornington, believe me, I'm always original. The only plagiarism I can see myself committing would be to marry a widow.

TINY. Why does Alethea shut herself up like this? Why won't she see me?

LADY PARCHESTER. It was indecent of old Steevy to admit the whole town into his confidence.

HANNAFORD. How he hates Frobisher! You know, when you think of it, this revolt of the son-in-law against Recognized Institutions is very comic. I imagine he thought that when he raised his voice—Miss Mornington, doesn't the Bible speak of a trumpeting gentleman who knocked over walls?

TINY. "When the priests blew with the trumpets, the walls of Jericho fell down flat."

HANNAFORD. It is evident that Jericho was jerry-built. Our walls are more substantial.

LADY PARCHESTER. It is a fact, I suppose, that Mr Bannister has taken over the house, and the rest?

LADY WESTERBY. Yes.

TINY. Well, as for me, I'm ultra-modern, of course, and all that—but I like Alethea, and I like her husband, and I think this separation is quite ridiculous.

HANNAFORD. This punctiliousness is a throw-back to your father the bishop.

TINY. I've a great respect for Jack Frobisher; and if I were his wife I'd follow him to the world's end.

HANNAFORD. There is a public-house of that name in Fulham.

LADY WESTERBY. Oh, Mr Hannaford, Mr Hannaford, one would like to believe, for once, that you had a heart, and not only a jest-box, inside you!

HANNAFORD. A heart! Why, I was brought up to be emotional, with a view to the Church, or the Poet-Laureateship. When I was seven I recited *Billy's Rose*. I shall go down to posterity as "Good-hearted Hannaford."

TINY. I do wish Alethea would let me see her.

LADY WESTERBY. She's very fond of you, I will tell her. But at present——

LADY PARCHESTER. Don't let her make too much of a trifle. It's our misfortune that we have to marry for money. But there is much to be said for a husband *in partibus*——

HANNAFORD. And a wife in Mayfair. Yes, that is the ideal. And as long as the husband remains *in partibus*, and does not look into jewellers' shops——

LADY PARCHESTER [*rising*]. Mr Hannaford, the subject is distasteful to me——

HANNAFORD. Ten thousand apologies. And I promise you I will rate Lord Parchester soundly.

LADY PARCHESTER. Good-bye, Lady Westerby. Please give Alethea my love, and tell her to let me know if I can do anything for her. Good-bye, Tiny.

[LADY WESTERBY *goes to bell.* HANNAFORD *opens the door.* LADY PARCHESTER *bows stiffly to* LADY WESTERBY *and goes.*

HANNAFORD. Marvellous creatures, women! Who could have imagined that she would be so annoyed? Her husband's vagaries have long been a standing jest between us.

TINY. I believe this last infatuation of his has nearly ruined them.

HANNAFORD. He should be locked up. The infatuation speaks through her nose, and is nearly as old as he. Good-bye, Lady Westerby; I will go after the lady and try to make my peace. Miss Mornington, if an American uncle should die, and leave me his money——

TINY. Then I shall be pleased to marry you—on your condition.

HANNAFORD. Which is?

TINY. You *in partibus*, and I in Mayfair.

HANNAFORD. Oh! Good-bye. . . . [*He goes off.*

TINY. For once he had no answer ready. He's a hateful creature—one sees one's own vices distorted. Do tell me about Alethea.

LADY WESTERBY. My dear, there's nothing to tell.

TINY. She's very fond of her husband—why does she let him go?

LADY WESTERBY. Lord Steventon has told you—he has told every one.

TINY. Mr Frobisher suddenly made up his mind to return to Queensland—they had a violent quarrel—she left the house and has not seen him since?

LADY WESTERBY [*with a deep sigh*]. Yes.

TINY. And when does he sail?

LADY WESTERBY. To-morrow.

TINY. To-morrow? She has been here?

LADY WESTERBY. Oh, yes. Every day.

TINY. And can you do nothing?

LADY WESTERBY. Nothing at all. Her father keeps them apart, and inflames her anger. I am quite helpless.

[*The servant comes in with* HANKEY.

MARY. Mr Bannister. [*She goes.*

HANKEY. How do you do, Lady Westerby? Good afternoon, Miss Mornington.

TINY. Well, Mr Bannister, most fortunate of men! Haven't you brought Lucy with you?

HANKEY. She's with the milliners and dressmakers. They've settled on her like flies.

TINY. The *trousseau*! The loveliest word in the language. It conjures up visions of beautiful frocks, and exquisite laces, and chiffons. I'm going to be bridesmaid, you know.

HANKEY. So I hear.

TINY. A little more enthusiasm, please. I understudy the bride. And if, at the last moment, she should say no, I, as the eldest bridesmaid, am expected to take her place.

HANKEY. Oh!

TINY. The exclamation's not very gallant. What are you going to give us?

HANKEY. A brooch, I believe.

TINY. Ah, the usual thing—pearls and diamonds, with interlaced monogram. I've a whole collection; and when I look at them I feel like the man who wants to play Hamlet, and is always cast for the ghost. Good-bye, Lady Westerby. You'll tell Alethea?

LADY WESTERBY. Oh, yes.

TINY. I'm so anxious to see her. My love to Lucy, Mr Bannister. Are you learning bridge?

HANKEY. Lucy is.

TINY. And you?

HANKEY. Oh, I've so much to learn!

TINY. That's true. But if I were you I'd teach instead. That's very cryptic, isn't it? Good-bye. [*She goes.*

HANKEY. What does she mean?

LADY WESTERBY. She's a wild, irresponsible creature, but with a very good heart. Well, have you any news?

HANKEY. None.

LADY WESTERBY. You told Mr Frobisher how hurt I was that he hadn't been here?

HANKEY. Yes. But he's been so frightfully busy—all his East End affairs to settle.

LADY WESTERBY. He knows that I called?

HANKEY. Yes. And he says he will come, if he can find time. But I don't fancy he will.

LADY WESTERBY. Why?

HANKEY. He can guess, of course, what you would say to him.

LADY WESTERBY. And then?

HANKEY. Why, he won't even let *me*! He stops me at once. I've tried often enough, God knows!

LADY WESTERBY. How is he?

HANKEY. He's all right—but he's like what he was, out in Queensland, when there was a row on. There's a look on his face that I haven't forgotten—and when it was there folks thought it best to leave Jack Frobisher alone.

LADY WESTERBY. Such old friends as you two——

HANKEY. Oh, you can be sure that I've done what I could—but Jack's got a way, when he sets his jaw square——

LADY WESTERBY. Oh, yes, I know—you men are like that. You think that it's big, and magnificent, to make up your mind, and stick to it rigidly. You let women have their own way, for years, and then suddenly want to drag them by the hair.

HANKEY. I don't think Jack's to blame.

LADY WESTERBY. Of course you don't—what man would? And I don't blame—I only lament.

HANKEY. I like Alethea—she can't hold a candle to Lucy, of course—but still——

LADY WESTERBY. If we could only have brought them together!

HANKEY. It would have been of no use—Alethea's mad with him. She hates him, she says.

LADY WESTERBY. As though it mattered what a woman says when she's angry!

HANKEY. I told Jack the child had been here every day—he didn't seem to know.

LADY WESTERBY. What! The nurse said nothing?

HANKEY. No. He seemed surprised.

LADY WESTERBY. Surprised! What did he think? See, they've been married three years, and what do they know of each other? Ah, well, there it is! Tell me of yourself. You're very happy of course?

HANKEY. Lucy's an angel—but there's a crumpled roseleaf.

LADY WESTERBY. His lordship?

HANKEY. Yes. He's disgustingly healthy.

LADY WESTERBY. Oh, he'll live to a hundred!

HANKEY. Don't be unkind. . . . There's a tribe I know of where it's considered bad form for a man ever to see his parents-in-law after the wedding.

LADY WESTERBY. How very uncivilized!

HANKEY. It has its points.

LADY WESTERBY. Well, let us hope your marriage will turn out more happily.

HANKEY. Oh, Lucy's quite a different sort of girl. She has ideals.

LADY WESTERBY. Poor Alethea! This is a case where one longed for a fever, an accident. Here they are, these two—both of them slaves to their obstinate pride——

HANKEY. That's it, of course—pride's at the bottom. But I don't suppose Alethea can really have loved him.

LADY WESTERBY. You foolish man! She adores him!

HANKEY. Then why——

LADY WESTERBY. *Because* she adores him! If he made a sign she'd fall into his arms. But her father has kept them apart, and carefully plays on her pride. She has been here, day after day; and I tell her, soon they'll be gone, your husband and child, and she cries, and cries—but when I beg her to go to him, write him a word, she talks of her . . . self-respect! Her self-respect! And with him it's the same—— Oh, I tell you it makes me——

[*The door opens and* MARY *comes in with* JACK. LADY WESTERBY *jumps up and goes to him with outstretched hands.*

LADY WESTERBY [*gladly*]. Mr Frobisher! [MARY *goes.*

JACK. How do you do, Lady Westerby? Jim, I thought I might find you here. I've a job for you—do you mind?

HANKEY. Of course not—what is it?

JACK. I've just had a wire—the doctor I had engaged can't come: his wife's fallen ill. I have another, but want to inquire about him

He refers me to Sir Benjamin Harrison, of 65 Harley Street. Could you go there for me? You'd find him in now.

HANKEY. I'll go at once. What's the man's name?

JACK. Blidstone. Here's his letter. It's awfully good of you, Jim.

HANKEY. Nonsense. Good-bye, Lady Westerby. See you later, Jack. [*He hurries off.*

LADY WESTERBY. You have engaged a doctor?

JACK. In case Archie should fall ill on the voyage. It's a long trip for the little man.

LADY WESTERBY. Yes.

JACK. Lady Westerby, I feel that I owe you an explanation, and an apology. You were good enough to call on me; and you must have thought me a boor not to return your visit.

LADY WESTERBY. I was a trifle hurt . . .

JACK. But you will have understood. This has been a case in which a man had to act for himself—and no intervention was possible—not even yours.

LADY WESTERBY. May I say it? I am a little . . . disappointed in you. . . .

JACK. I suppose that is inevitable. But I am sorry, for I value your good opinion.

LADY WESTERBY. Oh, Mr Frobisher, is it quite worthy of you to . . . fly?

JACK. You can call it that, of course. To you Australia means exile—to me it is home. Here I am merely a loafer—there I shall work. And see—let me make myself clear. When I asked my wife to go with me it was not my intention to stay there for ever; we should have remained for a couple of years, have mixed with real men and women: she would have learned the true meaning of life. And then we would have come back together, to this cruel city, and perhaps have done something here. Whereas, if I did not go, or fly, as you call it, within six weeks things would be as they were. Alethea would return to me, no doubt—but how long would it be before her friends gathered round her, before the old life began again? Our only salvation lay in a radical change.

LADY WESTERBY. And you take the child?

JACK. My duty is to the child. Shall I leave him here to be brought up to regard his grandfather as his model?

LADY WESTERBY. But——

JACK. Oh, believe me, I do what I must, I do what I have to do. I have work before me—that work must be done. I love Alethea; and where I love, I love deeply . . . but for a long time now she has ceased to care for me.

LADY WESTERBY. Oh, you are wrong!

JACK. Should I not know, I who have lived by her side?

LADY WESTERBY. She has seen Archie here every day—no mother could be more devoted. I've been with her for hours—all her fashionable, assumed indifference has melted away——

JACK. I have had not a line from her, not a word. Her father sent me his lawyers, to haggle for settlements. Alethea has been content.

LADY WESTERBY. Content! Remember what happened. Oh, why did you say those terrible things?

JACK. I said what was true.

LADY WESTERBY. Only God knows what is true. Sympathy, kindness, and love—these things tell the truth, these alone. When we are angry, and bitter, what we say may be facts, but they cannot be true. . . . See her! Appeal to her! One word from you——

JACK. My days of appeal are over.

LADY WESTERBY. And you sail to-morrow! When will you come back?

JACK. I shall never come back.

[*There is a moment's silence—then the door opens and* HANKEY *and* ALETHEA *come in.* HANKEY *gives a look round, nods eagerly, and goes.* ALETHEA *is amazed at seeing* JACK.

ALETHEA. You! [*To* HANKEY] You told me Archie was here. I——

[*She turns as though to go—*LADY WESTERBY *springs towards her.*

LADY WESTERBY. Alethea, Alethea, stay! Mr Frobisher, I implore you!

JACK. Will you come with me, Alethea?

ALETHEA [*coldly*]. No. I will not.

JACK. Your father is not here now, to distort the truth and poison your mind against me. I go to Queensland because the life we have led became impossible for us both. Your place is with me.

ALETHEA. No. After what you said—the way you have treated me—never!

LADY WESTERBY. Alethea!

JACK. For three years you behaved rather badly to me—for a quarter of an hour I was . . . somewhat violent. If the words I spoke have raised a barrier between us——

ALETHEA. They have, they have! I hate you!

LADY WESTERBY [*wringing her hands*]. Alethea!

JACK. Very well, then—so be it. On one point at least I am glad to find I was wrong—as regards Archie.

ALETHEA. And yet you take him from me. Oh, that is like you! You thought that because of my child I would go to Australia with you. I will not. But I tell you this—it is a vile and wicked thing to take my boy from me!

JACK. Why?

ALETHEA. Because—because—I want him!

[*She bursts into passionate tears, and sinks into a chair. There is a moment's silence.*

JACK. If I leave him with you, will you be a good mother to him?

ALETHEA [*brokenly*]. Yes, oh, yes!

JACK. Very well, then, he shall stay here. I go to Queensland alone. [ALETHEA *bows her head, but says nothing.*] Remember that he is my son; and try, in the time to come, to think more kindly of his father. And out there, in Queensland, I shall be waiting . . . for you both. . . . Good-bye. [*He turns to go.* ALETHEA *rushes towards him.*

ALETHEA. No, no, I will go with you, Jack—I will go with you! And, oh—I will try!

JACK. Ally!

[*He takes her in his arms; the* MARQUIS *bursts impetuously into the room, followed by* HANKEY, *who in vain tries to restrain him.*

MARQUIS [*frantically*]. Alethea! [*He turns fiercely on* LADY WESTERBY.] We have to thank *you* for this, my lady!

[ALETHEA, *locked in* JACK'S *arms, does not even hear him.*

LADY WESTERBY. No, Lord Steventon—let us thank God!

# HOBSON'S CHOICE

## A LANCASHIRE COMEDY

### By HAROLD BRIGHOUSE

*Originally produced in the United States. First produced in England at the Apollo Theatre, London, June 22, 1916*

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

| | |
|---|---|
| Henry Horatio Hobson | Dr MacFarlane |
| William Mossop | Maggie Hobson |
| Albert Prosser | Alice Hobson |
| Timothy (Tubby) Wadlow | Vickey Hobson |
| Jim Heeler | Mrs Hepworth |
| Freddy Beenstock | Ada Figgins |

*The scene is Salford, Lancashire, and the period is* 1880.

Act I. *Interior of Hobson's shop in Chapel Street.*
Act II. *The same scene.*
Act III. *Will Mossop's shop.*
Act IV. *Living-room of Hobson's shop.*

IN the *Comédie Humaine* of the London theatre scenes of provincial life are rarely presented. They lack the millinery motive, and although much may be forgiven to Devonshire on the plea that it is a charming county, the dramatist who elects to write of life in the industrial districts writes under a serious handicap. Occasionally a play breaks through, and *Hobson's Choice* put Salford on the international theatre map not only by creating in Maggie, Hobson, and Mossop three persons worthy to be hung in any gallery of comic character, but also because the playwright had the tactfulness to dress his revelation of the soul of Lancashire in the amusing costumes of the eighties.

Mr Brighouse is, in the English sense of the word, a Repertory dramatist. While *The Northerners* is an exception in being a tragic drama of the Luddites, the great body of his work is comedy; and plays

like *Garside's Career*, *Zack*, *Mary's John*, *What's Bred in the Bone*, and *It's a Gamble* make up an unexampled comic drama of the people in the industrial North. A witty farce, *The Odd Man Out*, is in lighter mood. Mr Brighouse has been described as "a playwright of modern industrialism, with excursions into fantasy, and in both regions," it is added, "he is perfectly at home." If, indeed, the London theatre knows less than America of his English industrial comedy, he is, rather remarkably, known to the lawns of our country houses for his delightful *Open-Air Plays* and *Plays for the Meadow and Plays for the Lawn*, of which *Maypole Morning*, *The Prince who was a Piper*, and *How the Weather is Made* may be instanced. Of his one-act plays *Lonesome-like* and *The Price of Coal* are outstanding examples of the drama of industrialism, *Followers*, *The Happy Hangman*, and *The Night of Mr H.* (a Charles Lamb pastiche) of period comedy. The Joan of Arc war-fantasy *Maid of France* continues long after the War its remarkable vogue in the Little Theatres of America.

Mr Brighouse is intrigued first by character, and only incidentally by plot and theatrical situation. He can be witty, fanciful, dramatic; and he can, when he chooses, move the heart to tenderness by restrained pathos. In *Hobson's Choice*, with its racy dialogue and its exhibition of local manners, he has told the truth about Lancashire as he saw it, without romantic gloss, and has succeeded in bringing Lancashire home to London and America as no novel has ever done.

# ACT I

*The scene represents the interior of* HOBSON'S *Boot Shop in Chapel Street, Salford. The shop-windows and entrance from street occupy the right side. Opposite is the counter, with exhibits of boots and slippers, behind which the wall is filled with racks containing boot-boxes. Cane chairs in front of counter. A door centre leads up two stairs to the house. In the centre of the stage is a trap leading to the cellar where work is done. There are no elaborate fittings. Gas-brackets in the windows and walls. The business is prosperous, but to prosper in Salford in* 1880 *you did not require the elaborate accessories of a later day. A very important customer goes for fitting into* HOBSON'S *sitting-room through the centre door. The rank and file use the cane chairs in the shop, which is dingy, but businesslike. The windows exhibit little stock, and amongst what there is clogs figure prominently. Through the windows comes the bright light of noon.*

*Sitting behind the counter are* HOBSON'S *two younger daughters,* ALICE, *who is twenty-three, and* VICTORIA, *who is twenty-one, and very pretty.* ALICE *is knitting and* VICTORIA *is reading. They are in black, with neat black aprons. The centre door opens, and* MAGGIE *enters. She is* HOBSON'S *eldest daughter, thirty.*

ALICE. Oh, it's you. I hoped it was Father going out.

MAGGIE. It isn't.

[*She crosses and takes her place down stage behind counter.* VICKEY *is up stage and* ALICE *in the middle.*

ALICE. He *is* late this morning.

MAGGIE. He got up late. [*She busies herself with an account-book.*

VICKEY. Has he had breakfast yet, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Breakfast! With a Masons' meeting last night?

VICKEY. He'll need reviving.

ALICE. Then I wish he'd go and do it.

VICKEY. Are you expecting anyone, Alice?

ALICE. Yes, I am, and you know I am, and I'll thank you both to go when he comes.

VICKEY. Well, I'll oblige you, Alice, if Father's gone out first, only you know I can't leave the counter till he goes.

[ALBERT PROSSER *enters from the street. He is twenty-six, nicely*

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*dressed, as the son of an established solicitor would be. He crosses to counter and raises his hat to* ALICE.

ALBERT. Good morning, Miss Alice.

ALICE. Good morning, Mr Prosser. [*She leans across counter.*] Father's not gone out yet. He's late.

ALBERT. Oh!

[*He turns to go, and is half-way to door when* MAGGIE *rises.*

MAGGIE. What can we do for you, Mr Prosser?

ALBERT [*stopping*]. Well, I can't say that I came in to buy anything, Miss Hobson.

MAGGIE. This is a shop, you know. We're not here to let people go out without buying.

ALBERT. Well, I'll just have a pair of bootlaces, please.

MAGGIE. What size do you take in boots?

[*She comes round counter with a small mat in her hand.*

ALBERT. Eights. I've got small feet. Does that matter to the laces?

MAGGIE [*putting mat in front of a chair*]. It matters to the boots [*She pushes him slightly.*] Sit down, Mr Prosser.

ALBERT [*sitting*]. Yes, but——

[MAGGIE *is on her knees unlacing his boot.*

MAGGIE. It's time you had a new pair. These uppers are disgraceful for a professional man to wear. Number eights from the third rack, Vickey, please.

ALICE. Mr Prosser didn't come in to buy boots, Maggie.

[VICKEY *comes down to* MAGGIE *with box, which she opens.*

MAGGIE. I wonder what does bring him in here so often.

ALBERT. I'm terrible hard on bootlaces, Miss Hobson.

[VICKEY *goes back.* MAGGIE *puts a new boot on him and laces it.*

MAGGIE. Do you get through a pair a day? You must be strong.

ALBERT. I keep a little stock of them. It's as well to be prepared for accidents.

MAGGIE. And now you'll have boots to go with the laces, Mr Prosser. How does that feel?

ALBERT. Very comfortable.

MAGGIE. Try it standing up.

ALBERT [*trying and walking a few steps*]. Yes, that fits all right.

MAGGIE. I'll put the other on.

ALBERT. Oh, no, I really don't want to buy them.

MAGGIE [*pushing him*]. Sit down, Mr Prosser. You can't go through the streets in odd boots.

ALBERT. What's the price of these?

MAGGIE. A pound.

ALBERT. A pound! I say——

MAGGIE. They're good boots, and you don't need to buy a pair of laces to-day, because we give them in as discount. Braid laces, that is. Of course, if you want leather ones, you being so strong in the arm and breaking so many pairs, you can have them, only it's tuppence more.

ALBERT. These—these will do.

MAGGIE. Very well, you'd better have the old pair mended and I'll send them home to you with the bill.

[*She has laced the second boot, rises, and moves away, throwing the boot-box at* VICKEY, *who gives a little scream at the interruption of her reading.* ALBERT *gasps.*

ALBERT. Well, if anyone had told me I was coming in here to spend a pound I'd have called him crazy.

MAGGIE. It's not wasted. Those boots will last. Good morning, Mr Prosser. [*She holds door open.*

ALBERT. Good morning. [*He looks blankly at* ALICE *and goes out.*

ALICE. Maggie, we know you're a pushing saleswoman, but——

MAGGIE [*returning to counter*]. It'll teach him to keep out of here a bit. He's too much time on his hands.

ALICE. You know why he comes.

MAGGIE. I know it's time he paid a rent for coming. A pair of laces a day's not half enough. Coming here to make sheep's eyes at you. I'm sick of the sight of him.

ALICE. It's all very well for an old maid like you to talk, but if Father won't have us go courting, where else can Albert meet me except here when Father's out?

MAGGIE. If he wants to marry you why doesn't he do it?

ALICE. Courting must come first.

MAGGIE. It needn't. [*She picks up a slipper.*] See that slipper with a fancy buckle on to make it pretty? Courting's like that, my lass. All glitter and no use to nobody.

[*She replaces slipper and sits at her desk.*

[HENRY HORATIO HOBSON *enters from the house. He is fifty-five, successful, coarse, florid, and a parent of the period. His hat is on. It is one of those felt hats which are half-way to tall hats in shape. He has a heavy gold chain and Masonic emblems on it. His clothes are bought to wear.*

HOBSON. Maggie, I'm just going out for a quarter of an hour.

MAGGIE. Yes, Father. Don't be late for dinner. There's liver.

HOBSON. It's an hour off dinner-time.

MAGGIE. So that, if you stay more than an hour in the Moonraker's Inn, you'll be late for it.

HOBSON. Moonraker's? Who said——?

VICKEY. If your dinner's ruined, it'll be your own fault.

HOBSON. Well, I'll be eternally——

ALICE. Don't swear, Father.

HOBSON [*putting hat on counter*]. No. I'll sit down instead. [*He takes chair, straddling across it and facing them with his elbows on its back.*] Listen to me, you three. I've come to conclusions about you. And I won't have it. Do you hear that? Interfering with my goings out and comings in. The idea! I've a mind to take measures with the lot of you.

MAGGIE. I expect Mr Heeler's waiting for you in Moonraker's, Father.

HOBSON. He can go on waiting. At present, I'm addressing a few remarks to the rebellious females of this house, and what I say will be listened to and heeded. I've noticed it coming on ever since your mother died. There's been a gradual increase of uppishness towards me.

VICKEY. Father, you'd have more time to talk after we've closed to-night.

HOBSON. I'm talking now, and you're listening. Providence has decreed that you should lack a mother's hand at the time when single girls grow bumptious and must have somebody to rule. But I'll tell you this, you'll none rule me.

VICKEY. I'm sure I'm not bumptious, Father.

HOBSON. Yes, you are. You're pretty, but you're bumptious, and I hate bumptiousness like I hate a lawyer.

ALICE. If we take trouble to feed you it's not bumptious to ask you not to be late for your food.

VICKEY. Give and take, Father.

HOBSON. I give and you take, and it's going to end.

MAGGIE. How much a week do you give us?

HOBSON. That's neither here nor there. At moment I'm on uppishness, and I'm warning you your conduct towards your parent's got to change. But that's not all. That's private conduct, and now I pass to broader aspects, and I speak of public conduct. I've looked upon my household as they go about the streets, and I've been disgusted. The fair name and fame of Hobson have been outraged by members of Hobson's family, and uppishness has done it.

VICKEY. I don't know what you're talking about.

HOBSON. Vickey, you're pretty, but you can lie like a gas-meter. Who had new dresses on last week?

ALICE. I suppose you mean Vickey and me?

HOBSON. I do.

VICKEY. We shall dress as we like, Father, and you can save your breath.

HOBSON. I'm not stopping in from my business appointments for the purpose of saving my breath.

VICKEY. You like to see me in nice clothes.

HOBSON. I do. I like to see my daughters nice. That's why I pay Mr Tudsbury, the draper, ten pounds a year a head to dress you proper. It pleases the eye and it's good for trade. But, I'll tell you, if some women could see themselves as men see them, they'd have a shock, and I'll have words with Tudsbury an' all, for letting you dress up like guys. I saw you and Alice out of the Moonraker's parlour on Thursday night, and my friend Sam Minns——

ALICE. A publican.

HOBSON. Aye, a publican. As honest a man as God Almighty ever set behind a bar, my ladies. My friend, Sam Minns, asked me who you were. And well he might. You were going down Chapel Street with a hump added to nature behind you.

VICKEY [*scandalized*]. Father!

HOBSON. The hump was wagging, and you put your feet on pavement as if you'd got chilblains—aye, stiff neck above and weak knees below. It's immodest!

ALICE. It is not immodest, Father. It's the fashion to wear bustles.

HOBSON. Then to hell with the fashion.

MAGGIE. Father, you are not in the Moonraker's now.

VICKEY. You should open your eyes to what other ladies wear.

HOBSON. If what I saw on you is any guide, I should do nowt of kind. I'm a decent-minded man. I'm Hobson. I'm British middle class, and proud of it. I stand for common sense and sincerity. You're affected, which is bad sense and insincerity. You've overstepped nice dressing and you've tried grand dressing—which is the occupation of fools and such as have no brains. You forget the majesty of trade and the unparalleled virtues of the British Constitution, which are all based on the sanity of the middle classes, combined with the diligence of the working classes. You're losing balance, and you're putting the things which don't matter in front of the things which do, and if you mean to be a factor in the world in Lancashire or a factor in the house of Hobson, you'll become sane.

VICKEY. Do you want us to dress like mill-girls?

HOBSON. No. Nor like French madams, neither. It's un-English, I say.

ALICE. We shall continue to dress fashionably, Father.

HOBSON. Then I've a choice for you two. Vickey, you I'm talking to, and Alice. You'll become sane if you're going on living here. You'll control this uppishness that's growing on you. And if you don't, you'll get out of this, and exercise your gifts on some one else than me. You don't know when you're well off. But you'll learn it when I'm done with you. I'll choose a pair of husbands for you, my girls. That's what I'll do.

ALICE. Can't we choose husbands for ourselves?

HOBSON. I've been telling you for the last five minutes you're not even fit to choose dresses for yourselves.

MAGGIE. You're talking a lot to Vickey and Alice, Father. Where do I come in?

HOBSON. You?

MAGGIE. If you're dealing husbands round, don't I get one?

HOBSON. Well, that's a good one! You with a husband!

MAGGIE. Why not?

HOBSON. Why not? I thought you'd sense enough to know. But if you want the brutal truth, you're past the marrying age. You're a proper old maid, Maggie, if ever there was one.

MAGGIE. I'm thirty.

HOBSON. Aye, thirty and shelved. Well, all the women can't get husbands. But you others, now. I've told you. I'll have less uppishness from you or else I'll shove you off my hands on to some other men. You can just choose which way you like.

[*He picks up hat and makes for door.*

MAGGIE. One o'clock dinner, Father.

HOBSON. See here, Maggie, I set the hours at this house. It's one o'clock dinner because I say it is, and not because you do.

MAGGIE. Yes, Father.

HOBSON. So long as that's clear I'll go. [*He is by door.*] Oh, no, I won't. Mrs Hepworth's getting out of her carriage. [*He puts hat on counter again.* MAGGIE *rises and opens door. Enter* MRS HEPWORTH, *an old lady with a curt manner and good clothes.*] Good morning, Mrs Hepworth. What a lovely day. [*He places chair.*

MRS HEPWORTH [*sitting*]. Morning, Hobson. [*She raises her skirt.*] I've come about those boots you sent me home.

HOBSON [*kneeling and fondling foot*]. Yes, Mrs Hepworth. They look very nice.

MRS HEPWORTH. Get up, Hobson. You look ridiculous on the floor. Who made these boots?

HOBSON. We did. Our own make.

[*He scrambles up, controlling his feelings.*

MRS HEPWORTH. Will you answer a plain question? Who made these boots?

HOBSON. They were made on the premises.

MRS HEPWORTH [*to* MAGGIE]. Young woman, you seemed to have some sense when you served me. Can you answer me?

MAGGIE. I think so, but I'll make sure for you, Mrs Hepworth. [*She opens trap and calls*] Tubby!

HOBSON. You wish to see the identical workman, madam?

MRS HEPWORTH. I said so.

HOBSON. I am responsible for all work turned out here.

MRS HEPWORTH. I never said you weren't.

[TUBBY WADLOW *comes up trap. A white-haired little man with thin legs and a paunch, in dingy clothes with no collar and a coloured cotton shirt. He has no coat on.*

TUBBY. Yes, Miss Maggie?

[*He stands half out of trap, not coming right up.*

MRS HEPWORTH. Man, did you make these boots?

[*She rises and advances one pace towards him.*

TUBBY. No, ma'am.

MRS HEPWORTH. Then who did? Am I to question every soul in the place before I find out?

TUBBY. They're Willie's making, those.

MRS HEPWORTH. Then tell Willie I want him.

TUBBY. Certainly, ma'am. [*He goes down trap.*

MRS HEPWORTH. Who's Willie?

HOBSON. Name of Mossop, madam. But if there is anything wrong I assure you I'm capable of making the man suffer for it. I'll——

[WILLIE MOSSOP *comes up trap. He is a lanky fellow, about thirty, not naturally stupid, but stunted mentally by a brutalized childhood. He is a raw material of a charming man, but, at present, it requires a very keen eye to detect his potentialities. His clothes are an even poorer edition of* TUBBY'S.

MRS HEPWORTH. Are you Mossop?

WILLIE. Yes, mum.

MRS HEPWORTH. You made these boots?

WILLIE [*peering at them*]. Yes, I made them last week.

MRS HEPWORTH. Take that. [WILLIE, *bending down, rather expects "that" to be a blow. Then he raises his head and finds she is holding out a visiting-card. He takes it.*] See what's on it?

WILLIE [*bending over the card*]. Writing?

MRS HEPWORTH. Read it.

WILLIE. I'm trying. [*His lips move as he tries to spell it out.*

MRS HEPWORTH. Bless the man. Can't you read?

WILLIE. I do a bit. Only it's such funny print.

MRS HEPWORTH. It's the usual italics of a visiting-card, my man. Now listen to me. I heard about this shop, and what I heard brought me here for these boots. I'm particular about what I put on my feet.

HOBSON. I assure you it shall not occur again, Mrs Hepworth.

MRS HEPWORTH. What shan't?

HOBSON. I—I don't know.

MRS HEPWORTH. Then hold your tongue. Mossop, I've tried every

shop in Manchester, and these are the best-made pair of boots I've ever had. Now, you'll make my boots in future. You hear that, Hobson?

HOBSON. Yes, madam, of course he shall.

MRS HEPWORTH. You'll keep that card, Mossop, and you won't dare leave here to go to another shop without letting me know where you are.

HOBSON. Oh, he won't make a change.

MRS HEPWORTH. How do you know? The man's a treasure, and I expect you underpay him.

HOBSON. That'll do, Willie. You can go.

WILLIE. Yes, sir. [*He dives down trap.* MAGGIE *closes it.*

MRS HEPWORTH. He's like a rabbit. [*She rises.*

MAGGIE. Can I take your order for another pair of boots, Mrs Hepworth?

MRS HEPWORTH. Not yet, young woman. But I shall send my daughters here. And, mind you, that man's to make the boots.

MAGGIE. Certainly, Mrs Hepworth.

MRS HEPWORTH. Good morning. [HOBSON *opens door.*

HOBSON. Good morning, Mrs Hepworth. Very glad to have the honour of serving you, madam. [*She goes out.* HOBSON *closes door.*] I wish some people would mind their own business. What does she want to praise a workman to his face for?

MAGGIE. I suppose he deserved it.

HOBSON. Deserved be blowed! Making them uppish. That's what it is. Last time she puts her foot in my shop, I give you my word.

MAGGIE. Don't be silly, Father.

HOBSON. I'll show her. Thinks she owns the earth because she lives at Hope Hall.

[*Enter from street* JIM HEELER, *who is a grocer, and* HOBSON's *boon companion.*

JIM [*looking down street as he enters*]. That's a bit of a startler.

HOBSON [*swinging round*]. Eh? Oh, morning, Jim.

JIM. You're doing a good class trade if the carriage folk come to you, Hobson.

HOBSON. What?

JIM. Wasn't that Mrs Hepworth?

HOBSON. Oh, yes. Mrs Hepworth's an old and valued customer of mine.

JIM. It's funny you deal with Hope Hall and never mentioned it.

HOBSON. Why, I've made boots for her and all her circle for . . . how long, Maggie? Oh, I dunno.

JIM. You kept it dark. Well, aren't you coming round yonder?

HOBSON [*reaching for his hat*]. Yes. That is, no.

JIM. Are you ill?

HOBSON. No. Get away, you girls. I'll look after the shop. I want to talk to Mr Heeler.

JIM. Well, can't you talk in the Moonraker's?

[*The girls go up centre stairs to house*, MAGGIE *last.*

HOBSON. Yes, with Sam Minns, and Denton and Tudsbury there.

JIM. It's private, then. What's the trouble, Henry?

[HOBSON *waves* JIM *into chair. They sit.*

HOBSON. They're the trouble. [*Indicates door to house.*] Do your daughters worry you, Jim?

JIM. Nay, they mostly do as I bid them, and the missus does the leathering if they don't.

HOBSON. Ah, Jim, a wife's a handy thing, and you don't know it proper till she's taken from you. I felt grateful for the quiet when my Mary fell on rest, but I can see my mistake now. I used to think I was hard put to it to fend her off when she wanted summat out of me, but the dominion of one woman is Paradise to the dominion of three.

JIM. It sounds a sad case, Henry.

HOBSON. I'm a talkative man by nature, Jim. You know that.

JIM. You're an orator, Henry. I doubt John Bright himself is better gifted of the gab than you.

HOBSON. Nay, that's putting it a bit too strong. A good case needs no flattery.

JIM. Well, you're the best debater in the Moonraker's parlour.

HOBSON. And that's no more than truth. Yes, Jim, in the estimation of my fellow-men I give forth words of weight. In the eyes of my daughters I'm a windbag.

JIM. Nay. Never!

HOBSON. I am. They scorn my wisdom, Jim. They answer back. I'm landed in a hole—a great and undignified hole. My own daughters have got the upper hand of me.

JIM. Women are worse than men for getting above themselves.

HOBSON. A woman's foolishness begins where man's leaves off.

JIM. They want a firm hand, Henry.

HOBSON. I've lifted up my voice and roared at them.

JIM. Beware of roaring at women, Henry. Roaring is mainly hollow sound. It's like trying to defeat an army with banging drums instead of cold steel. And it's steel in a man's character that subdues the women.

HOBSON. I've tried all ways, and I'm fair moithered. I dunno what to do.

JIM. Then you quit roaring at 'em and get 'em wed.

HOBSON. I've thought of that. Trouble is to find the men.

JIM. Men's common enough. Are you looking for angels in breeches?

HOBSON. I'd like my daughters to wed temperance young men, Jim.

JIM. You keep your ambitions within reasonable limits, Henry. You've three daughters to find husbands for.

HOBSON. Two, Jim, two.

JIM. Two?

HOBSON. Vickey and Alice are mostly window-dressing in the shop. But Maggie's too useful to part with. And she's a bit on the ripe side for marrying, is our Maggie.

JIM. I've seen 'em do it at double her age. Still, leaving her out, you've two.

HOBSON. One'll do for a start, Jim. It's a thing I've noticed about wenches. Get one wedding in a family, and it goes through the lot like measles.

JIM. Well, you want a man, and you want him temperance. It'll cost you a bit, you know.

HOBSON. Eh? Oh, I'll get my hand down for the wedding all right.

JIM. A warm man like you 'ull have to do more than that. There's things called settlements.

HOBSON. Settlements?

JIM. Aye. You've to bait your hook to catch fish, Henry.

HOBSON. Then I'll none go fishing.

JIM. But you said——

HOBSON. I've changed my mind. I'd a fancy for a bit of peace, but there's luxuries a man can buy too dear. Settlements indeed!

JIM. I had a man in mind.

HOBSON. You keep him there, Jim. I'll rub along and chance it. Settlements indeed!

JIM. You save their keep.

HOBSON. They work for that. And they're none of them big eaters.

JIM. And their wages?

HOBSON. Wages? Do you think I pay wages to my own daughters? I'm not a fool.

JIM. Then it's all off?

HOBSON [*turns*]. From the moment that you breathed the word 'settlements' it was dead off, Jim. Let's go to the Moonraker's and forget there's such a thing as women in the world. [*He takes up hat and opens centre door.*] Shop! Shop! [MAGGIE *enters.*] I'm going out, Maggie.

MAGGIE [*she remains by door*]. Dinner's at one, remember.

HOBSON. Dinner will be when I come in for it. I'm master here.

MAGGIE. Yes, Father. One o'clock.

HOBSON. Come along, Jim.

[JIM *and* HOBSON *go out to street.* MAGGIE *turns to speak inside centre door.*

MAGGIE. Dinner at half-past one, girls. We'll give him half an hour. [*She closes door, and moves to trap, which she raises.*] Willie, come here. [*In a moment* WILLIE *appears, and stops half-way up.*

WILLIE. Yes, Miss Maggie?

MAGGIE. Come up, and put the trap down, I want to talk to you. [*He comes, reluctantly.*

WILLIE. We're very busy in the cellar.

MAGGIE. Show me your hands, Willie.

WILLIE. They're dirty. [*He holds them out hesitatingly.*

MAGGIE. Yes, they're dirty, but they're clever. They can shape the leather like no other man's that ever came into the shop. Who taught you, Willie? [*She retains his hands.*

WILLIE. Why, Miss Maggie, I learnt my trade here.

MAGGIE. Hobson's never taught you to make boots the way you do.

WILLIE. I've had no other teacher.

MAGGIE [*dropping his hands*]. And needed none. You're a natural born genius at making boots. It's a pity you're a natural fool at all else.

WILLIE. I'm not much good at owt but leather, and that's a fact.

MAGGIE. When are you going to leave Hobson's?

WILLIE. Leave Hobson's? I—I thought I gave satisfaction.

MAGGIE. Don't you want to leave?

WILLIE. Not me. I've been at Hobson's all my life, and I'm not for leaving till I'm made.

MAGGIE. I said you were a fool.

WILLIE. Then I'm a loyal fool.

MAGGIE. Don't you want to get on, Will Mossop? You heard what Mrs Hepworth said. You know the wages you get and you know the wages a bootmaker like you could get in one of the big shops in Manchester.

WILLIE. Nay, I'd be feared to go in them fine places.

MAGGIE. What keeps you here? Is it the—the people?

WILLIE. I dunno what it is. I'm used to being here.

MAGGIE. Do you know what keeps this business on its legs? Two things: one's the good boots you make that sell themselves, the other's the bad boots other people make and I sell. We're a pair, Will Mossop.

WILLIE. You're a wonder in the shop, Miss Maggie.

MAGGIE. And you're a marvel in the workshop. Well?

WILLIE. Well, what?

MAGGIE. It seems to me to point one way.

WILLIE. What way is that?

MAGGIE. You're leaving me to do the work, my lad.

WILLIE. I'll be getting back to my stool, Miss Maggie.

MAGGIE. You'll go back when I've done with you. I've watched

you for a long time and everything I've seen, I've liked. I think you'll do for me.

WILLIE. What way, Miss Maggie?

MAGGIE. Will Mossop, you're my man. Six months I've counted on you, and it's got to come out some time.

WILLIE. But I never——

MAGGIE. I know you never, or it 'ud not be left to me to do the job like this.

WILLIE. I'll—I'll sit down. [*He sits in armchair, mopping his brow.*] I'm feeling queer-like. What dost want me for?

MAGGIE. To invest in. You're a business idea in the shape of a man.

WILLIE. I've got no head for business at all.

MAGGIE. But I have. My brain and your hands 'ull make a working partnership.

WILLIE [*getting up, relieved*]. Partnership! Oh, that's a different thing. I thought you were axing me to wed you.

MAGGIE. I am.

WILLIE. Well, by gum! And you the master's daughter.

MAGGIE. Maybe that's why, Will Mossop. Maybe I've had enough of Father, and you're as different from him as any man I know.

WILLIE. It's a bit awkward-like.

MAGGIE. And you don't help me any, lad. What's awkward about it?

WILLIE. You talking to me like this.

MAGGIE. I'll tell you something, Will. It's a poor sort of woman who'll stay lazy when she sees her best chance slipping from her. A Salford life's too near the bone to lose things through the fear of speaking out.

WILLIE. I'm your best chance?

MAGGIE. You are that, Will.

WILLIE. Well, by gum! I never thought of this.

MAGGIE. Think of it now.

WILLIE. I am doing. Only the blow's a bit too sudden to think very clear. I've a great respect for you, Miss Maggie. You're a shapely body and you're a masterpiece at selling in the shop, but when it comes to marrying, I'm bound to tell you that I'm none in love with you.

MAGGIE. Wait till you're asked. I want your hand in mine and your word for it that you'll go through life with me for the best we can get out of it.

WILLIE. We'd not get much without there's love between us, lass.

MAGGIE. I've got the love all right.

WILLIE. Well, I've not, and that's honest.

MAGGIE. We'll get along without.

WILLIE. You're desperate set on this. It's a puzzle to me all ways. What 'ud your father say?

MAGGIE. He'll say a lot, and he can say it. It'll make no difference to me.

WILLIE. Much better not upset him. It's not worth while.

MAGGIE. I'm judge of that. You're going to wed me, Will.

WILLIE. Oh, nay, I'm not. Really I can't do that, Maggie. I can see that I'm disturbing your arrangements like, but I'll be obliged if you'll put this notion from you.

MAGGIE. When I make arrangements, my lad, they're not made for upsetting.

WILLIE. What makes it so desperate awkward is that I'm tokened.

MAGGIE. You're what?

WILLIE. I'm tokened to Ada Figgins.

MAGGIE. Then you'll get loose and quick. Who's Ada Figgins? Do I know her?

WILLIE. I'm the lodger at her mother's.

MAGGIE. The scheming hussy. It's not that sandy girl who brings your dinner?

WILLIE. She's golden-haired is Ada. Aye, she'll be here soon.

MAGGIE. And so shall I. I'll talk to Ada. I've seen her and I know the breed. Ada's the helpless sort.

WILLIE. She needs protecting.

MAGGIE. That's how she got you, was it? Yes, I can see her clinging round your neck until you fancied you were strong. But I'll tell you this, my lad, it's a desperate poor kind of a woman that'll look for protection to the likes of you.

WILLIE. Ada does.

MAGGIE. And that gives me the weight of her. She's born to meekness, Ada is. You wed her, and you'll be an eighteen-shilling-a-week bootmaker all the days of your life. You'll be a slave, and a contented slave.

WILLIE. I'm not ambitious that I know of.

MAGGIE. No. But you're going to be. I'll see to that. I've got my work cut out, but there's the makings of a man about you.

WILLIE. I wish you'd leave me alone.

MAGGIE. So does the fly when the spider catches him. You're my man, Willie Mossop.

WILLIE. Aye, so you say. Ada would tell another story, though.

[ADA FIGGINS *enters from street. She is not ridiculous, but a weak, poor-blooded, poor-spirited girl of twenty, in clogs and shawl, with* WILLIE'S *dinner in a basin carried in a blue handkerchief. She crosses to him and gives him the basin.*

ADA. There's your dinner, Will.

WILLIE. Thank you, Ada.

[*She turns to go, and finds* MAGGIE *in her way.*

MAGGIE. I want a word with you. You're treading on my foot, young woman.

ADA. Me, Miss 'Obson? [*She looks stupidly at* MAGGIE's *feet.*

MAGGIE. What's this with you and him?

ADA [*gushing*]. Oh, Miss 'Obson, it is good of you to take notice like that.

WILLIE. Ada, she——

MAGGIE. You hold your hush. This is for me and her to settle. Take a fair look at him, Ada.

ADA. At Will?

MAGGIE [*nodding*]. Not much for two women to fall out over, is there?

ADA. Maybe he's not so much to look at, but you should hear him play.

MAGGIE. Play? Are you a musician, Will?

WILLIE. I play the Jew's harp.

MAGGIE. That's what you see in him, is it? A gawky fellow that plays the Jew's harp?

ADA. I see the lad I love, Miss 'Obson.

MAGGIE. It's a funny thing, but I can say the same.

ADA. You!

WILLIE. That's what I've been trying to tell you, Ada, and—and, by gum, she'll have me from you if you don't be careful.

MAGGIE. So we're quits so far, Ada.

ADA. You'll pardon me. You've spoke too late. Will and me's tokened.

MAGGIE. That's the past. It's the future that I'm looking to. What's your idea for that?

ADA. You mind your own business, Miss 'Obson. Will Mossop's no concern of thine.

WILLIE. That's what I try to tell her myself, only she will have it it's no use.

MAGGIE. Not an atom. I've asked for your idea of Willie's future. If it's a likelier one than mine, I'll give you best and you can have the lad.

ADA. I'm trusting him to make the future right.

MAGGIE. It's as bad as I thought it was. Willie, you wed me.

ADA [*weakly*]. It's daylight robbery.

WILLIE. Aren't you going to put up a better fight for me than that, Ada? You're fair giving me to her.

MAGGIE. Will Mossop, you take your orders from me in this shop. I've told you you'll wed me.

WILLIE. Seems like there's no escape.

ADA. Wait while I get you to home, my lad. I'll set my mother on to you.

MAGGIE. Oh, so it's her mother made this match!

WILLIE. She had above a bit to do with it.

MAGGIE. I've got no mother, Will.

WILLIE. You need none, neither.

MAGGIE. Well, can I sell you a pair of clogs, Miss Figgins?

ADA. No. Nor anything else.

MAGGIE. Then you've no business here, have you?

ADA. Will, are you going to see me ordered out?

WILLIE. It's her shop, Ada.

ADA. You mean I'm to go like this?

WILLIE. She means it.

ADA. It's cruel hard.

MAGGIE. When it comes to a parting, it's best to part sudden and no whimpering about it.

ADA. I'm not whimpering, and I'm not parting, either. But he'll whimper to-night when my mother sets about him. [*She opens door.*

MAGGIE. That'll do.

ADA. Will Mossop, I'm telling you, you'll come home to-night to a thick ear. [*She goes.*

WILLIE. I'd really rather wed Ada, Maggie, if it's all same to you.

MAGGIE. Why? Because of her mother?

WILLIE. She's a terrible rough side to her tongue, has Mrs Figgins.

MAGGIE. Are you afraid of her?

WILLIE [*hesitates, then says*]. Yes.

MAGGIE. You needn't be.

WILLIE. Yes, but you don't know her. She'll jaw me till I'm black in the face when I go home to-night.

MAGGIE. You won't go home to-night.

WILLIE. Not go!

MAGGIE. You've done with lodging there. You'll go to Tubby Wadlow's when you knock off work, and Tubby 'ull go round to Mrs Figgins for your things.

WILLIE. And I'm not to go back there never no more?

MAGGIE. No.

WILLIE. It's like an 'appy dream. Eh, Maggie, you do manage things.

MAGGIE. And while Tubby's there you can go round and see about putting the banns up for us two.

WILLIE. Banns! Oh, but I'm hardly used to the idea yet.

MAGGIE. You'll have three weeks to get used to it in. Now you can kiss me, Will.

WILLIE. That's forcing things a bit, and all. It's like saying I agree to everything, a kiss is.

MAGGIE. Yes.

WILLIE. And I don't agree yet. I'm——

MAGGIE. Come along. [ALICE, *then* VICKEY, *enter from living apartments.*] Do what I tell you, Will.

WILLIE. Now? With them here?

MAGGIE. Yes.

WILLIE [*pause*]. I couldn't.

[*He dives for trap, runs down, and closes it.*

ALICE. What's the matter with Willie?

MAGGIE. He's a bit upset because I've told him he's to marry me. Is dinner cooking nicely?

ALICE. You're going to marry Willie Mossop! Willie Mossop!

VICKEY. You've kept it quiet, Maggie.

MAGGIE. You know about it pretty near as soon as Willie does himself.

VICKEY. Well, I don't know!

ALICE. I know, and if you're afraid to speak your thoughts, I'm not. Look here, Maggie, what you do touches us, and you're mistaken if you think I'll own Willie Mossop for my brother-in-law.

MAGGIE. Is there supposed to be some disgrace in him?

ALICE. You ask Father if there's disgrace. And look at me. I'd hopes of Albert Prosser till this happened.

MAGGIE. You'll marry Albert Prosser when he's able, and that'll be when he starts spending less on laundry bills and hair-cream.

[HOBSON *enters from the street.*

HOBSON. Well, what about that dinner?

MAGGIE. It'll be ready in ten minutes.

HOBSON. You said one o'clock.

MAGGIE. Yes, Father. One for half-past. If you'll wash your hands it'll be ready as soon as you are.

HOBSON. I won't wash my hands. I don't hold with such finicking ways, and well you know it.

VICKEY. Father, have you heard the news about our Maggie?

HOBSON. News? There is no news. It's the same old tale. Uppishness. You'd keep a starving man from the meat he earns in the sweat of his brow, would you? I'll put you in your places. I'll——

MAGGIE. Don't lose your temper, Father. You'll maybe need it soon when Vickey speaks.

HOBSON. What's Vickey been doing?

VICKEY. Nothing. It's about Will Mossop, Father.

HOBSON. Will?

ALICE. Yes. What's your opinion of Will?

HOBSON. A decent lad. I've nowt against him that I know of.

ALICE. Would you like him in the family?

HOBSON. Whose family?

VICKEY. Yours.

MAGGIE. I'm going to marry Willie, Father. That's what all the fuss is about.

HOBSON. Marry—you—Mossop!

MAGGIE. You thought me past the marrying age. I'm not. That's all.

HOBSON. Didn't you hear me say I'd do the choosing when it came to a question of husbands?

MAGGIE. You said I was too old to get a husband.

HOBSON. You are. You all are.

VICKEY. Father!

HOBSON. And if you're not, it makes no matter. I'll have no husbands here.

ALICE. But you said——

HOBSON. I've changed my mind. I've learnt some things since then. There's a lot too much expected of a father nowadays. There'll be no weddings here.

ALICE. Oh, Father!

HOBSON. Go and get my dinner served and talk less. Go on now. I'm not in right temper to be crossed.

[*He drives* ALICE *and* VICKEY *before him. They go out protesting loudly. But* MAGGIE *stands in his way as he follows and she closes the door. She looks at him from the stair.*

MAGGIE. You and I 'ull be straight with one another, Father. I'm not a fool and you're not a fool, and things may as well be put in their places as left untidy.

HOBSON. I tell you my mind's made up. You can't have Willie Mossop. Why, lass, his father was a workhouse brat. A come-by-chance.

MAGGIE. It's news to me we're snobs in Salford. I have Willie Mossop. I've to settle my life's course, and a good course, too, so think on.

HOBSON. I'd be the laughing-stock of the place if I allowed it. I won't have it, Maggie. It's hardly decent at your time of life.

MAGGIE. I'm thirty and I'm marrying Willie Mossop. And now I'll tell you my terms.

HOBSON. You're in a nice position to state terms, my lass.

MAGGIE. You will pay my man, Will Mossop, the same wages as before. And as for me, I've given you the better part of twenty years of work without wages. I'll work eight hours a day in future, and you will pay me fifteen shillings by the week.

HOBSON. Do you think I'm made of brass?

MAGGIE. You'll soon be made of less than you are if you let Willie go. And if Willie goes, I go. That's what you've got to face.

HOBSON. I might face it, Maggie. Shop hands are cheap.

MAGGIE. Cheap ones are cheap. The sort you'd have to watch all day, and you'd feel happy helping them to tie up parcels and sell laces with Tudsbury and Heeler and Minns supping their ale without you. I'm value to you, so's my man; and you can boast it at the Moonraker's that your daughter Maggie's made the strangest, finest match a woman's made this fifty year. And you can put your hand in your pocket and do what I propose.

HOBSON. I'll show you what I propose, Maggie. [*He lifts trap and calls.*] Will Mossop! [*He places hat on counter and unbuckles belt.*] I cannot leather you, my lass. You're female, and exempt, but I can leather him. Come up, Will Mossop. [WILL *comes up trap and closes it.*] You've taken up with my Maggie, I hear. [*He conceals strap.*

WILLIE. Nay, I've not. She's done the taking up.

HOBSON. Well, Willie, either way, you've fallen on misfortune. Love's led you astray, and I feel bound to put you right. [*Shows strap.*

WILLIE. Maggie, what's this?

MAGGIE. I'm watching you, my lad.

HOBSON. Mind, Willie, you can keep your job. I don't bear malice, but we must beat the love from your body, and every morning you come here to work with love still sitting in you, you'll get a leathering.

WILLIE. You'll not beat love in me. You're making a great mistake, Mr Hobson, and——

HOBSON. You'll put aside your weakness for my Maggie if you've a liking for a sound skin. You'll waste a gradely lot of brass at chemist's if I am at you for a week with this. [*He swings the strap.*

WILLIE. I'm none wanting thy Maggie, it's her that's after me, but I'll tell you this, Mr Hobson—if you touch me with that belt, I'll take her quick, aye, and stick to her like glue.

HOBSON. There's nobbut one answer to that kind of talk, my lad.

[*He strikes with belt.* MAGGIE *shrinks.*

WILLIE. And I've nobbut one answer back. Maggie, I've none kissed you yet. I shirked before. But, by gum, I'll kiss you now—[*he kisses her quickly, with temper, not with passion, as quickly leaves her, to face* HOBSON]—and take you and hold you. And if Mr Hobson raises up that strap again, I'll do more. I'll walk straight out of shop with thee and us two 'ull set up for ourselves.

MAGGIE. Willie! I knew you had it in you, lad.

[*She puts her arm round his neck. He is quite unresponsive. His hands fall limply to his sides.*

[HOBSON *stands in amazed indecision.*

# ACT II

*A month later. The shop as Act I. It is about midday.* ALICE *is in* MAGGIE'S *chair at the desk, some ledgers in front of her, and* VICKEY *is reading behind the counter. The trap is open, and* TUBBY *stands near the desk by* ALICE.

ALICE. I'm sure I don't know what to tell you to do, Tubby.

TUBBY. There's nothing in at all to start on, Miss Alice. We're worked up.

ALICE. Well, Father's out and I can't help you.

TUBBY. He'll play old Harry if he comes in and finds us doing nowt in the workroom.

VICKEY. Then do something. We're not stopping you.

TUBBY. You're not telling me neither. And I'm supposed to take my orders from the shop.

ALICE. I don't know what to tell you. Nobody seems to want any boots made.

TUBBY. The high-class trade has dropped like a stone this last month. Of course we can go on making clogs for stock if you like.

ALICE. Then you'd better.

TUBBY. You know what's got by selling clogs won't pay the rent, let alone wages, but if clogs are your orders, Miss Alice——

[*He moves towards trap.*

ALICE. You suggested it.

TUBBY. I made the remark. But I'm not a rash man, and I'm not going to be responsible to the master with his temper so nowty and all since Miss Maggie went.

ALICE. Oh, dear! What would Miss Maggie have told you to do?

TUBBY. I couldn't tell you that, miss, I'm sure. I don't recollect things being as slack as this in her time.

VICKEY. You don't help us much for an intelligent foreman.

TUBBY. When you've told me what to do I'll use my intelligence and see it's done properly.

ALICE. Then go and make clogs.

TUBBY. Them's your orders?

ALICE. Yes.

TUBBY. Thank you, Miss Alice. [TUBBY *goes down trap and closes it.*

ALICE. I wonder if I've done right?

VICKEY. That's your look-out.

ALICE. I don't care. It's Father's place to be here to tell them what to do.

VICKEY. Maggie used to manage without him.

ALICE. Oh, yes. Go on. Blame me that the place is all at sixes and sevens.

VICKEY. I don't blame you. I know as well as you do that it's Father's fault. He ought to look after his business himself instead of wasting more time than ever in the Moonraker's, but you needn't be snappy with me about it.

ALICE. I'm not snappy in myself. It's these figures. I can't get them right. What's seventeen and twenty-five?

VICKEY [*promptly*]. Fifty-two, of course.

ALICE. Well, it doesn't balance right. Oh, I wish I was married and out of it.

VICKEY. Same here.

ALICE. You!

VICKEY. You needn't think you're the only one.

ALICE. Well, you're sly, Vickey Hobson. You've kept it to yourself.

VICKEY. It's just as well now that I did. Maggie's spoilt our chances for ever. Nobody's fretting to get Willie Mossop for a brother-in-law.

[MAGGIE *enters, followed by* FREDDY BEENSTOCK *and then* WILL. MAGGIE *and* WILL *are actually about to be married, but their dress does not specially indicate it. They are not in their older clothes, and that is all.* FREDDY *is smarter than either, though only in his everyday dress. He is not at all a blood, but the respectable son of a respectable tradesman, and his appearance is such as to justify his attractiveness in* VICKEY'S *eyes.*

ALICE. Maggie, you here!

MAGGIE. I thought we'd just drop in. Vickey, what's this that Mr Beenstock's telling me about you and him?

VICKEY [*sullenly*]. If he's told you I suppose you know.

FREDDY [*smilingly*]. She got it out of me, Vickey.

VICKEY. I don't know that it's any business of yours, Maggie.

MAGGIE. You'll never get no farther with it by yourselves from what I hear of Father's carryings-on.

VICKEY. That's your fault. Yours and his.

[*Indicating* WILLIE, *who is trying to efface himself at the back.*

MAGGIE [*sharply*]. Leave that alone. I'm here to help you if you'll have my help. [VICKEY *would say "No," but*——

FREDDY. It's very good of you, Miss Maggie, I must say. Your father has turned very awkward.

MAGGIE. I reckon he'll change. Has your young man been in yet this morning, Alice?

ALICE [*indignantly*]. My young——

MAGGIE. Albert Prosser.

ALICE. No.

MAGGIE. Do you expect him?

ALICE. He's not been here so often since you and Willie Mossop got——

MAGGIE [*sharply*]. Since when?

ALICE. Since you made him buy that pair of boots he didn't want.

MAGGIE. I see. He didn't like paying for taking his pleasure in our shop. Well, if he's not expected, somebody must go for him. Prosser, Pilkington, and Prosser, Solicitors of Bexley Square. That's right, isn't it?

ALICE. Yes. Albert's "and Prosser."

MAGGIE. Aye? Quite a big man in his way. Then, will you go and fetch him, Mr Beenstock? Tell him to bring the paper with him.

VICKEY [*indignantly*]. *You're* ordering folk about a bit.

MAGGIE. I'm used to it.

FREDDY. It's all right, Vickey.

ALICE. Is it? Suppose Father comes in and finds Albert and Freddy here?

MAGGIE. He won't.

ALICE. He's beyond his time already.

MAGGIE. I know. You must have worried Father very badly since I went, Alice.

ALICE. Why?

MAGGIE. Tell them, Mr Beenstock.

FREDDY. Well, the fact is, Mr Hobson won't come because he's at our place just now.

VICKEY. At your corn warehouse? What's Father doing there?

FREDDY. He's—he's sleeping, Vickey.

ALICE. Sleeping?

FREDDY. You see, we've a cellar trap in our place that opens in the pavement and your Father—wasn't looking very carefully where he was going and he fell into it.

VICKEY. Fell? Is Father hurt?

FREDDY. He's snoring very loudly, but he isn't hurt. He fell soft on some bags.

MAGGIE. Now you can go for Albert Prosser.

ALICE. Is that all we're to be told?

MAGGIE. It's all there is to tell till Freddy's seen his solicitor.

FREDDY. I'll not be long.

MAGGIE. Don't. I've a job here for you when you get back.

[FREDDY *goes.*

ALICE. I don't know what you're aiming at, Maggie, but——

MAGGIE. The difference between us is that I do. I always did.

VICKEY [*indicating* WILLIE]. It's a queer thing you aimed at.

MAGGIE [*taking* WILL'S *arm*]. I've done uncommon well myself, and I've come here to put things straight for you. Father told you to get married and you don't shape.

ALICE. He changed his mind.

MAGGIE. I don't allow for folks to change their minds. He made his choice. He said get married, and you're going to.

VICKEY. You haven't made it easier for us, you know.

MAGGIE. Meaning Willie?

WILLIE. It wasn't my fault, Miss Vickey, really it wasn't.

MAGGIE. You call her Vickey, Will.

VICKEY. No, he doesn't.

MAGGIE. He's in the family, or going to be. And I'll tell you this. If you want your Freddy, and if you want your Albert, you'll be respectful to my Willie.

ALICE. Willie Mossop was our boot hand.

MAGGIE. He was, and you'll let bygones be bygones. He's as good as you are now, and better.

WILLIE. Nay, come, Maggie——

MAGGIE. Better, I say. They're shop assistants. You're your own master, aren't you?

WILLIE. I've got my name wrote up on the windows, but I dunno so much about being master.

MAGGIE [*producing card*]. That's his business card, William Mossop, Practical Boot and Shoe Maker, 39A Oldfield Road, Salford. William Mossop, Master Bootmaker! That's the man you're privileged to call by his Christian name. Aye, and I'll do more for you than let you call him in his name. You can both of you kiss him for your brother-in-law to be.

WILLIE. Nay, Maggie, I'm no great hand at kissing.

[VICKEY *and* ALICE *are much annoyed.*

MAGGIE [*drily*]. I've noticed that. A bit of practice will do you no harm. Come along, Vickey.

ALICE [*interposing*]. But, Maggie . . . a shop of your own——

MAGGIE [*grimly*]. I'm waiting, Vickey.

WILLIE. I don't see that you ought to drive her to it, Maggie.

MAGGIE. You hold your hush.

ALICE. But however did you manage it? Where did the capital come from?

MAGGIE. It came. Will, stand still. She's making up her mind to it.

WILLIE. I'd just as lief not put her to the trouble.

MAGGIE. You'll take your proper place in this family, my lad, trouble or no trouble.

VICKEY. I don't see why you should always get your way.

MAGGIE. It's just a habit. Come along now, Vickey, I've a lot to do to-day and you're holding everything back.

VICKEY. It's under protest.

MAGGIE. Protest, but kiss. [VICKEY *kisses* WILL, *who finds he rather likes it.*] Your turn now, Alice.

ALICE. I'll do it if you'll help me with these books, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Books? Father's put you in my place?

ALICE. Yes.

MAGGIE. Then he must take the consequences. Your books aren't my affair.

ALICE. I think you might help me, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I'm surprised at you, Alice, I really am, after what you've just been told. Exposing your books to a rival shop. You ought to know better. Will's waiting. And you're to kiss him hearty now.

ALICE. Very well. [*She kisses* WILL.

WILLIE. There's more in kissing nice young women than I thought.

MAGGIE. Don't get too fond of it, my lad.

ALICE. Well, I hope you're satisfied, Maggie. You've got your way again, and now perhaps you'll tell us if there's anything you want in this shop.

MAGGIE. Eh? Are you trying to sell me something?

ALICE. I'm asking you, what's your business here?

MAGGIE. I've told you once. Will and me's taking a day off to put you in the way of getting wed.

VICKEY. It looks like things are slow at your new shop if you can walk round in your best clothes on a working day.

WILLIE. It's not a working day with us. It's a wedding-day.

ALICE. You've been married this morning!

MAGGIE. Not us. I'll have my sisters there when I get wed. It's at one o'clock at Saint Philip's.

VICKEY. But we can't leave the shop to come.

MAGGIE. Why not? Is trade so brisk?

VICKEY. No, but——

MAGGIE. Not so much high-class trade doing with you, eh?

ALICE. I don't see how you knew.

MAGGIE. I'm good at guessing. You'll not miss owt by coming with us to church, and we'll expect you at home to-night for a wedding-spread.

VICKEY. It's asking us to approve.

MAGGIE. You have approved. You've kissed the bridegroom, and you'll go along with us. Father's safe where he is.

ALICE. And the shop?

MAGGIE. Tubby can see to the shop. And that reminds me. You *can* sell me something. There are some rings in that drawer there, Vickey.

VICKEY. Brass rings?

MAGGIE. Yes. I want one. That's the size.

[*She holds up her wedding-ring finger.*

VICKEY. That! But you're not taking it for——

[VICKEY *puts box of rings on counter.*

MAGGIE. Yes, I am. Will and me aren't throwing money round, but we can pay our way. There's fourpence for the ring. Gather it up, Vickey. [*Putting down money and trying on rings.*

ALICE. Wedded with a brass ring!

MAGGIE. This one will do. It's a nice fit. Alice, you haven't entered that sale in your book. No wonder you're worried with the accounts if that's the way you see to them. [*She puts ring in her bag.*

ALICE. I'm a bit too much astonished at you to think about accounts. A ring out of stock!

MAGGIE. They're always out of some one's stock.

VICKEY. Well, I'd think shame to myself to be married with a ring like that.

MAGGIE. When folks can't afford the best they have to do without.

VICKEY. I'll take good care I never go without.

MAGGIE. Semi-detached for you, I suppose, and a houseful of new furniture.

ALICE. Haven't you furnished?

MAGGIE. Partly what. We've made a start at the Flat Iron Market.

ALICE. I'd stay single sooner than have other people's cast-off sticks in my house. Where's your pride gone to, Maggie?

MAGGIE. I'm not getting wed myself to help the furnishing trade along. I suppose you'd turn your nose up at second-hand stuff, too, Vickey?

VICKEY. I'd start properly or not at all.

MAGGIE. Then you'll neither of you have any objections to my clearing out the lumber-room upstairs. We brought a hand-cart round with us.

[WILL *takes his coat off. He has detachable cuffs which he places carefully on the armchair.*

VICKEY. You made sure of things.

MAGGIE. Yes. Get upstairs, Will. I told you what to bring.

ALICE. Wait a bit.

MAGGIE. Go on. [WILL *goes into the house.*

ALICE. Let me tell you if you claim the furniture from your old bedroom, that it's my room now, and you'll not budge a stick of it.

MAGGIE. I expected you'd promote yourself, Alice. But I said lumber-room. There's a two-three broken chairs in the attic and a sofa with the springs all gone. You'll not tell me they're of any use to you.

ALICE. Nor to you, neither.

MAGGIE. Will's handy with his fingers. He'll put in this afternoon mending them. They'll be secure against you come to sit on them at supper-time to-night.

VICKEY. And that's the way you're going to live! With cast-off furniture.

MAGGIE. Aye. In two cellars in Oldfield Road.

VICKEY *and* ALICE. A cellar!

MAGGIE. *Two* of 'em, Alice. One to live and work in and the other to sleep in.

ALICE. Well, it 'ud not suit me.

VICKEY. Nor me.

MAGGIE. It suits me fine. And when me and Will are richer than the lot of you together it'll be a grand satisfaction to look back and think about how we were when we began.

[WILL *appears at centre door with two crippled chairs, and begins to cross the shop.*

Vickey. Just a minute, Will. [*She examines the chairs.*] These chairs are not so bad.

MAGGIE. You can sit on one to-night and see.

VICKEY. You know, mended up, those chairs would do very well for my kitchen when I'm wed.

ALICE. Yes, or for mine.

MAGGIE. I reckon my parlour comes afront of your kitchens, though.

VICKEY. Parlour! I thought you said you'd only one living-room.

MAGGIE. Then it might as well be called a parlour as by any other name. Put the chairs on the hand-cart, Will. [WILL *goes out to street.*] And as for your kitchens, you've got none yet, and if you want my plan for you to work, you'll just remember all I'm taking off you is some crippled stuff that isn't yours and what I'm getting for you is marriage portions.

ALICE. What?

VICKEY. Marriage portions, Maggie?

[FREDDY *re-enters, accompanied by* ALBERT.

MAGGIE [*to* VICKEY *and* ALICE]. You'd better put your hats on now, or you'll be late at the church.

VICKEY. But aren't we to know first——?

MAGGIE [*herding them to centre exit*]. You'll know all right. Be quick with your things now. [ALICE *and* VICKEY *go out centre door.*

MAGGIE [*turns*]. Good morning, Albert. Have you got what Freddy asked you for?

ALBERT. Yes, but I'm afraid—— [WILL *re-enters from street.*

MAGGIE. Never mind being afraid. Freddy, I told you I'd a job here for you. You go upstairs with Will. There's a sofa to come down. Get your coat off to it. Now, then, Albert.

FREDDY. But——

MAGGIE. I've told you what to do, and you can't do it in your coat. If that sofa isn't here in two minutes, I'll leave the lot of you to tackle this yourselves, and a nice hash you'll make of it.

[FREDDY *takes his coat off.*

FREDDY. All right, Maggie.

[ALBERT *produces blue paper. She reads.*

MAGGIE. Do you call this English?

ALBERT. Legal English, Miss Hobson.

MAGGIE. I thought it weren't the sort we talk in Lancashire. What is it when you've got behind the whereases and the saids and to wits?

ALBERT. It's what you told Freddy to instruct me. Action against Henry Horatio Hobson for trespass on the premises of Jonathan Beenstock and Co., Corn Merchants, of Chapel Street, Salford, with damages to certain corn bags caused by falling on them and further damages claimed for spying on the trade secrets of the aforesaid J. B. and Co.

MAGGIE. Well, I'll take your word that this means that—I shouldn't have thought it, but I suppose lawyers are like doctors. They've each a secret language of their own, so that if you get a letter from one lawyer you've to take it to another to get it read, just like a doctor sends you to a chemist with a rigmarole that no one else can read, so they can charge you what they like for a drop of coloured water.

ALBERT. I've made this out to your instructions, Miss Hobson, but I'm far from saying it's good law, and I'd not be keen on going into court with it.

MAGGIE. Nobody asked you to. It won't come into court. [WILL *and* FREDDY *enter centre with a ramshackle horsehair sofa.*] Open that door for them, Albert. [ALBERT *opens street door. They pass out.*] What's the time? You can see the clock from there.

ALBERT [*outside street door*]. It's a quarter to one.

MAGGIE [*flying to centre door, opening it, and calling*]. Girls, if you're late for my wedding I'll never forgive you. [*She turns as* WILL *and* FREDDY *return.*] Put your coats on. Now, then, Freddy, you take that paper and put it on *my* father in *your* cellar.

FREDDY. Now?

MAGGIE. Now? Yes, of course now. He might waken any time.

FREDDY. He looked fast enough. Aren't I to come to the church?

MAGGIE. Yes, if you do that quick enough to get there before we're through.

FREDDY. All right. [*He goes out, pocketing the paper.*

MAGGIE. Now, there's that hand-cart. Are we to take it with us?

ALBERT. To church! You can't do that.

WILLIE. I'll take it home.

MAGGIE. And have me waiting for you at the church? That's not for me, my lad.

ALBERT. You can't very well leave it where it is.

MAGGIE. No. There's only one thing for it. You'll have to take it to our place, Albert.

ALBERT. Me!

MAGGIE. There's the key. [*Hands it from her bag.*] It's 39A Oldfield Road.

ALBERT. Yes, but to push a hand-cart through Salford in broad daylight!

MAGGIE. It won't dirty your collar.

ALBERT. Suppose some of my friends see me?

MAGGIE. Look here, my lad, if you're too proud to do a job like that, you're not the husband for my sister.

ALBERT. It's the look of the thing. Can't you send somebody from here?

MAGGIE. No. You can think it over. [*She raises trap.*] Tubby!

TUBBY [*below*]. Yes, miss. [*He appears half-way up trap.*] Why, it's Miss Maggie!

MAGGIE. Come up, Tubby. You're in charge of the shop. We'll all be out for a while.

TUBBY. I'll be up in half a minute, Miss Maggie.

[*He goes down and closes trap.*

MAGGIE. Well, Albert Prosser?

ALBERT. I suppose I must.

MAGGIE. That's right. We'll call it your wedding gift to me, and I'll allow you're putting yourself out a bit for me. [*Going with him to the door. He goes. She turns.*] Well, Will, you've not had much to say for yourself to-day. Howst feeling, lad?

WILLIE. I'm going through with it, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Eh?

WILLIE. My mind's made up. I've got wrought up to point. I'm ready.

MAGGIE. It's church we're going to, not the dentist's.

WILLIE. I know. You get rid of summat at dentist's, but it's taking summat on to go to church with a wench, and the Lord knows what.

MAGGIE. Sithee, Will, I've a respect for church. Yon's not the place for lies. The parson's going to ask you will you have me and you'll either answer truthfully or not at all. If you're not willing, just say so now, and——

WILLIE. I'll tell him "Yes."

MAGGIE. And truthfully?

WILLIE. Yes, Maggie. I'm resigned. You're growing on me, lass. I'll toe the line with you.

[ALICE *and* VICKEY *enter centre in their Sunday clothes—the same at which* HOBSON *grew indignant in Act I.*

ALICE. We're ready, Maggie.

MAGGIE. And time you were. It's not your weddings that you're dressing for. [*By trap*] Come up, Tubby, and keep an eye on things.

VICKEY [*to* WILL]. Will, you have got the ring?

MAGGIE. I have. Do you think I'd trust him to remember?

[MAGGIE *goes off with* WILL. VICKEY *and* ALICE *are following, laughing.* TUBBY *comes up trap and throws old shoes after them.*

## ACT III

*The cellar in Oldfield Road is at once workroom, shop, and living-room. It is entered from the left corner by a door at the top of a flight of some seven stairs. Its three windows are high up at the back—not shop-windows, but simply to give light. Each window has on it "William Mossop, Practical Bootmaker," reversed as seen from the inside and is illuminated dimly from outside by a neighbouring street lamp.*

*Inside a door right leads to the bedroom. Up stage right is a small screen or partition whose purpose is to conceal the sink. A shoemaker's bench, leather, and tackle are against the wall, left, above the fireplace. Below the door, right, is a small dresser. Table centre. Seating accommodation consists solely of the sofa and the two chairs taken from* HOBSON'S, *now repaired. The sofa is right of the table, the two chairs left. Crowded on the sofa are, in order, from down up,* ALBERT, ALICE, VICKEY, FRED.

*As the curtain rises the four are standing, teacups in hand, saying together "The Bride and Bridegroom." They drink and sit. General laughter and conversation. On the chair down stage is* MAGGIE. *From the other chair, centre, behind table,* WILL *rises, nervously, and rushes his little speech like a child who has learnt a lesson. The table has hot-house flowers (in a basin) and the remains of a meal at which tea only has been drunk, and the feast is represented by the sections of a large pork pie and a small wedding-cake. As* WILL *rises* ALBERT *hammers on the table.* ALICE *suppresses him.*

WILLIE. It's a very great pleasure to us to see you here to-night. It's an honour you do us, and I assure you, speaking for my—my wife, as well as for myself, that the—the——

MAGGIE. Generous.

WILLIE. Oh, aye. That's it. That the generous warmth of the sentiments so cordially expressed by Mr Beenstock and so enthusiastically seconded by—no, I've gotten that wrong road round—expressed by Mr Prosser and seconded by Mr Beenstock—will never be forgotten by either my life partner or self—and—and I'd like to drink this toast to you in my own house. Our guests, and may they all be married soon themselves.

MAGGIE [*rising and drinking with* WILL]. Our guests.

[WILL *and* MAGGIE *sit.*

ALBERT [*solemnly rising*]. In rising to respond——

ALICE [*tugging his coat and pulling him into his seat*]. Sit down. We've had enough of speeches. I know men fancy themselves when they're talking, but you've had one turn and you needn't start again.

ALBERT. But we ought to thank him, Alice.

ALICE. I dare say. But you'll not speak as well as he did, so we can leave it with a good wind-up. I'm free to own you took me by surprise, Will.

FREDDY. Very neat speech indeed.

VICKEY. Who taught you, Will?

WILLIE. I've been learning a lot lately.

ALICE. I thought that speech never came natural from Will.

MAGGIE. I'm educating him.

FREDDY. Very apt pupil, I must say.

MAGGIE. He'll do. Another twenty years and I know which of you three men 'ull be thought most of at the Bank.

FREDDY. That's looking ahead a bit.

MAGGIE. I'll admit it needs imagination to see it now.

ALBERT. Well, the start's all right, you know. Snug little rooms. Shop of your own. And so on. I was wondering where you raised the capital for this, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I? You mustn't call it my shop. It's his.

ALICE. Do you mean to tell me that Willie found the capital?

MAGGIE. He's the saving sort.

ALICE. He must be if you've done this out of what Father used to pay him.

MAGGIE. Well, we haven't. Not altogether. We've had help.

ALBERT. Ah!

VICKEY. It's a mystery to me where you got it from.

MAGGIE. Same place as those flowers, Albert.

ALBERT. Hot-house flowers, I see. [*He rises and examines them.*] I was wondering where they came from.

MAGGIE. Same place as the money, Albert.

ALBERT. Ah!

ALICE [*rising*]. Well, I think we ought to be getting home, Maggie.

MAGGIE [*rising, as do the rest*]. I shouldn't marvel. I reckon Tubby's a bit tired of looking after the shop by now, and if Father's wakened up and come in——

ALICE. That's it. I'm a bit nervous.

MAGGIE. He'll have an edge on his temper. Come and put your hats on. [*She is going right with* ALICE *and* VICKEY, *then stops.*] Willie, we'll need this table when they're gone. You'd better be clearing the pots away.

WILLIE. Yes, Maggie. [MAGGIE *turns to right.*

FREDDY. But—you——

ALBERT. Oh, Lord! [*They laugh.*

MAGGIE [*quite calmly*]. And you and Fred can just lend him a hand with the washing up, Albert.

FREDDY. Me wash pots!

VICKEY [*really outraged*]. Maggie, we're guests.

MAGGIE. I know. Only Albert laughed at Willie, and washing up 'ull maybe make him think on that it's not allowed.

[*She ushers* ALICE *and* VICKEY *out, and follows.* WILLIE *begins to put pots on tray which he gets from behind screen, right.*

ALBERT [*after he and* FRED *have looked at each other, then at* WILL, *then at each other again*]. Are you going to wash up pots?

FREDDY. Are you?

ALBERT. I look at it like this myself. All being well, you and I are marrying into this family, and we know what Maggie is. If we start giving in to her now, she'll be a nuisance to us all our lives.

FREDDY. That's right enough, but there's this plan of hers to get us married. Are you prepared to work it for us?

ALBERT. I'm not. Anything but——

FREDDY. Then till she's done it we're to keep the sweet side of Maggie

ALBERT. But washing pots!

[*There is a pause. They look at* WILL, *who has brought the tray from behind the screen and is now clearing up the table.*

FREDDY. What would you do in our place, Will?

WILLIE. Please yourselves. I'm getting on with what she told me.

FREDDY. You're married to her. We aren't.

ALBERT. What do you need the table for in such a hurry?

WILLIE. Nay, I'm not in any hurry myself.

FREDDY. Maggie wants it for something.

WILLIE. It'll be for my lessons, I reckon. She's schooling me.

FREDDY. And don't you want to learn, then?

WILLIE. 'Tisn't that. I—just don't want to be rude to you—turning you out so early. I don't see you need to go away so soon.

ALBERT. Why not?

WILLIE. I'm fond of a bit of company.

ALBERT. Do you want company on your wedding night?

WILLIE. I don't favour your going so soon.

FREDDY. He's afraid to be alone with her. That's what it is. He's shy of his wife.

WILLIE. That's a fact. I've not been married before, you see. I've not been left alone with her, either. Up to now she's been coming round to where I lodged at Tubby Wadlow's to give me my lessons. It's different now, and I freely own I'm feeling awkward-like. I'd be deeply obliged if you would stay on a bit to help to—to thaw the ice for me.

FREDDY. You've been engaged to her, haven't you?

WILLIE. Aye, but it weren't for long. And you see, Maggie's not the sort you get familiar with.

FREDDY. You had quite long enough to thaw the ice. It's not our job to do your melting for you.

ALBERT. No. Fred, these pots need washing. We will wash them.

[ALBERT *carries tray behind screen. Water runs. He is seen flourishing towels.* FRED *is following when* WILLIE *calls him back and takes tray to table.*

WILLIE. Fred, would you like it yourself with—with a wench like Maggie?

FREDDY. That's not the point. It wasn't me she married.

WILLIE. It's that being alone with her that worries me, and I did think you'd stand by a fellow-man to make things not so strange at first.

ALBERT. That's not the way we look at it. Hurry up with those cups, Fred. [MAGGIE *enters with* VICKEY *and* ALICE *in outdoor clothes.*

MAGGIE. Have you broken anything yet, Albert?

ALBERT [*indignantly*]. Broken? No.

MAGGIE. Too slow to, I expect.

FREDDY. I must say you don't show much gratitude.

ALBERT. Aren't you at all surprised to find us doing this?

MAGGIE. Surprised? I told you to do it.

FREDDY. Yes, but——

MAGGIE [*taking towel from him*]. You can stop now. I'll finish when you're gone. [*Knock at door upstairs, left.*

ALICE. Who's that?

MAGGIE. Some one who can't read, I reckon. You hung that card on door, Will?

WILLIE. Aye, it's there. And you wrote it, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I knew better than to trust to you. "Business suspended for the day" it says, and they that can't read it can go on knocking.

HOBSON [*off left upstairs, after another knock*]. Are you in, Maggie?

VICKEY [*terrified*]. It's Father!

ALBERT. Oh, Lord!

MAGGIE. What's the matter? Are you afraid of him?

FREDDY. Well, I think, all things considered, and seeing——

MAGGIE. All right. We'll consider 'em. You can go into the bedroom, the lot of you. . . . No, not you, Willie. The rest. I'll shout when I want you.

ALICE. When he's gone.

MAGGIE. It'll be before he's gone.

[MAGGIE *crosses to right with them.*

VICKEY. But we don't want——

MAGGIE. Is this your house or mine?

VICKEY. It's your cellar.

MAGGIE. And I'm in charge of it. [*The four go into bedroom.* WILL *is going to stairs.*] You sit you still, and don't forget you're gaffer here. I'll open door.

[MAGGIE *goes upstairs and opens the door. Enter* HOBSON *to top stair.*

HOBSON [*with some slight apology*]. Well, Maggie.

MAGGIE [*uninvitingly*]. Well, Father.

HOBSON [*without confidence*]. I'll come in.

MAGGIE [*standing in his way*]. Well, I don't know. I'll have to ask the master about that.

HOBSON. Eh? The master?

MAGGIE. You and him didn't part on the best of terms, you know. [*Over the railings*] Will, it's my father. Is he to come in?

WILLIE [*loudly and boldly*]. Aye, let him come.

[HOBSON *comes downstairs.* MAGGIE *closes door behind him and follows.* HOBSON *stares round at the cellar.*

HOBSON. You don't sound cordial about your invitation, young man.

WILLIE. Nay, but I am. [*Shaking hands for a long time.*] I'm right down glad to see you, Mr Hobson. It makes the wedding-day complete-like, you being her father and I—I hope you'll see your way to staying a good long while.

HOBSON. Well——

MAGGIE. That's enough, Will. You don't need to overdo it. You can sit down for five minutes, Father. That sofa 'ull bear your weight. It's been tested.

WILLIE [*taking up teapot*]. There's nobbut tea to drink and I reckon what's in the pot is stewed, so I'll——

MAGGIE [*taking pot off him as he moves to fireplace with it*]. You'll not do owt of sort. Father likes his liquids strong.

WILLIE. A piece of pork pie now, Mr Hobson?

HOBSON [*groaning*]. Pork pie!

MAGGIE [*sharply*]. You'll be sociable now you're here, I hope.

[*She pours tea*

HOBSON. It wasn't sociability that brought me, Maggie.

MAGGIE. What was it then?

HOBSON. Maggie, I'm in disgrace. A sore and sad misfortune's fallen on me.

MAGGIE [*cutting*]. Happen a piece of wedding-cake 'ull do you good.

HOBSON [*shuddering*]. It's sweet.

MAGGIE. That's natural in cake. [MAGGIE *sits.*

HOBSON. I've gotten such a head.

MAGGIE. Aye. But wedding-cake's a question of heart. There'd be no bride-cakes made at all if we thought first about our heads. I'm quite aware it's foolishness, but I've a wish to see my father sitting at my table eating my wedding-cake on my wedding-day.

HOBSON. It's a very serious thing I came about, Maggie.

MAGGIE. It's not more serious than knowing that you wish us well.

HOBSON. Well, Maggie, you know my way. When a thing's done it's done. You've had your way and done what you wanted. I'm none proud of the choice you made and I'll not lie and say I am, but I've shaken your husband's hand, and that's a sign for you. The milk's spilt and I'll not cry.

MAGGIE [*holding plate*]. Then there's your cake, and you can eat it.

HOBSON. I've given you my word there's no ill-feeling.

[*Pushes cake away.*

MAGGIE. So now we'll have the deed. [*Pushes it back.*

HOBSON. You're a hard woman. [*He eats.*] You've no consideration for the weakness of old age.

MAGGIE. Finished?

HOBSON. Pass me that tea. [*She passes; he drinks.*] That's easier.

MAGGIE. Now tell me what it is you came about?

HOBSON. I'm in sore trouble, Maggie.

MAGGIE [*rising*]. Then I'll leave you with my husband to talk it over.

HOBSON. Eh?

MAGGIE. You'll not be wanting me. Women are only in your way.

HOBSON [*rising*]. Maggie, you're not going to desert me in the hour of my need, are you?

MAGGIE. Surely to goodness you don't want a woman to help you after all you've said! Will 'ull do his best, I make no doubt. [*She goes towards door.*] Give me a call when you've finished, Will.

HOBSON [*following her*]. Maggie! It's private.

MAGGIE. Why, yes. I'm going and you can discuss it man to man with no fools of women about.

HOBSON. I tell you I've come to see you, not him. It's private from him.

MAGGIE. Private from Will? Nay, it isn't. Will's in the family, and you've nowt to say to me that can't be said to him.

HOBSON. I've to tell you this with him there?

MAGGIE. Will and me's one.

WILLIE. Sit down, Mr Hobson.

MAGGIE. You call him Father now.

WILLIE [*astonished*]. Do I?

HOBSON. Does he?

MAGGIE. He does. Sit down, Will. [WILL *sits right of table.* MAGGIE *stands at the head of the table.* HOBSON *sits on sofa.*] Now, if you're ready, Father, we are. What's the matter?

HOBSON. That—[*producing the blue paper*]—that's the matter.

[MAGGIE *accepts and passes it to* WILL, *and goes behind his chair. He is reading upside-down. She bends over chair and turns it right way up.*

MAGGIE. What is it, Will?

HOBSON [*banging table*]. Ruin, Maggie, that's what it is! Ruin and bankruptcy. Am I vicar's warden at Saint Philip's or am I not? Am I Hobson of Hobson's Boot Shop on Chapel Street, Salford? Am I a respectable ratepayer and the father of a family, or——

MAGGIE [*who has been reading over* WILL's *shoulder*]. It's an action for damages for trespass, I see.

HOBSON. It's a stab in the back, it's an unfair, un-English, cowardly way of taking a mean advantage of a casual accident.

MAGGIE. Did you trespass?

HOBSON. Maggie, I say it solemnly, it is all your fault. I had an accident. I don't deny it. I'd been in the Moonraker's, and I'd stayed too long. And why? Why did I stay too long? To try to forget that I'd a thankless child, to erase from the tablets of memory the recollection of your conduct. That was the cause of it. And the result, the blasting, withering result? I fell into that cellar. I slept in that cellar and I awoke to this catastrophe. Lawyers . . . law-costs . . . publicity . . . ruin.

MAGGIE. I'm still asking you. Was it an accident? Or did you trespass?

HOBSON. It's an accident. As plain as Salford Town Hall it's an accident, but they that live by law have twisted ways of putting things that make white show as black. I'm in their grip at last. I've kept away from lawyers all my life, I've hated lawyers, and they've got their chance to make me bleed for it. I've dodged them, and they've caught me in the end. They'll squeeze me dry for it.

WILLIE. My word, and that's summat like a squeeze and all!

[HOBSON *stares at him.*

MAGGIE. I can see it's serious. I shouldn't wonder if you didn't lose some trade from this.

HOBSON. Wonder! It's as certain as Christmas. My good-class

customers are not going to buy their boots from a man who's stood up in open court and had to acknowledge he was overcome at twelve o'clock in the morning. They'll not remember it was private grief that caused it all. They'll only think the worse of me because I couldn't control my daughter better than to let her go and be the cause of sorrow to me in my age. That's what you've done. Brought this on me, you two, between you.

WILLIE. Do you think it will get into the paper, Maggie?

MAGGIE. Yes, for sure. You'll see your name in the *Salford Reporter*, Father.

HOBSON. *Salford Reporter*! Yes, and more. When there is ruin and disaster, and outrageous fortune overwhelms a man of my importance to the world, it isn't only the *Salford Reporter* that takes note of it. This awful cross that's come to me will be recorded in the *Manchester Guardian* for the whole of Lancashire to read.

WILLIE. Eh, by gum, think of that! To have your name appearing in the *Guardian*! Why, it's very near worth while to be ruined for the pleasure of reading about yourself in a printed paper.

HOBSON. It's there for others to read besides me, my lad.

WILLIE. Aye, you're right. I didn't think of that. This 'ull give a lot of satisfaction to a many I could name. Other people's troubles is mostly what folks read the paper for, and I reckon it's twice the pleasure to them when it's trouble of a man they know themselves.

[*He is perfectly simple and has no malicious intention.*

HOBSON. To hear you talk it sounds like a pleasure to you.

WILLIE [*sincerely*]. Nay, it's not. You've ate my wedding-cake and you've shook my hand. We're friends, I hope, and I were nobbut meditating like a friend. I always think it's best to look on the worst side of things first, then whatever chances can't be worse than you looked for. There's Saint Philip's now. I don't suppose you'll go on being vicar's warden after this to-do, and it brought you a powerful lot of customers from the church, did that.

HOBSON. I'm getting a lot of comfort from your husband, Maggie.

MAGGIE. It's about what you deserve.

HOBSON. Have you got any more consolation for me, Will?

WILLIE [*aggrieved*]. I only spoke what came into my mind.

HOBSON. Well, have you spoken it all?

WILLIE. I can keep my mouth shut if you'd rather.

HOBSON. Don't strain yourself, Will Mossop. When a man's mind is full of thoughts like yours, they're better out than in. You let them come, my lad. They'll leave a cleaner place behind.

WILLIE. I'm not much good at talking, and I always seem to say wrong things when I do talk. I'm sorry if my well-meant words don't suit your taste, but I thought you came here for advice.

HOBSON. I didn't come to you, you jumped-up cock-a-hooping——

MAGGIE. That 'ull do, Father. My husband's *trying* to help you.

HOBSON [*glares impatiently for a time, then meekly says*]. Yes, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Now about this accident of yours.

HOBSON. Yes, Maggie.

MAGGIE. It's the publicity that you're afraid of most.

HOBSON. It's being dragged into a court of law at all, me that's voted right all through my life and been a sound supporter of the Queen and Constitution.

MAGGIE. Then we must try to keep it out of court.

HOBSON. If there are lawyers in heaven, Maggie, which I doubt, they may keep cases out of courts there. On earth a lawyer's job's to squeeze a man and squeeze him where his squirming's seen the most—in court.

MAGGIE. I've heard of cases being settled out of court, in private.

HOBSON. In private? Yes, I dare say, and all the worse for that. It's done amongst themselves in lawyers' offices behind closed doors so no one can see they're squeezing twice as hard in private as they'd dare to do in public. There's some restraint demanded by a public place, but privately! It'll cost a fortune to settle this in private, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I make no doubt it's going to cost you something, but you'd rather do it privately than publicly?

HOBSON. If only it were not a lawyer's office.

MAGGIE. You can settle it with the lawyer out of his office. You can settle with him here. [*She goes right and opens door.*] Albert! [*Enter* ALBERT, *who leaves door open.*] This is Mr Prosser, of Prosser, Pilkington, and Prosser.

HOBSON [*amazed*]. He is!

MAGGIE. Yes.

HOBSON [*incredulously, rising*]. You're a lawyer?

ALBERT. Yes, I'm a lawyer.

HOBSON [*with disgust almost too deep for words*]. At your age!

MAGGIE [*going up to door*]. Come out, all of you.

[*There is reluctance inside, then* VICKEY, ALICE, *and* FRED *enter and stand in a row.*

HOBSON. Alice! Vickey!

MAGGIE. Family gathering. This is Mr Beenstock, of Beenstock and Co.

FREDDY. How do you do?

HOBSON. What! Here!

[*The situation is plainly beyond his mused brain's capacity.*

MAGGIE. When you've got a thing to settle, you need all the parties to be present.

HOBSON. But there are so many of them. Where have they all come from?

MAGGIE. My bedroom.

HOBSON. Your——? Maggie, I wish you'd explain before my brain gives way.

MAGGIE. It's quite simple. I got them here because I expected you.

HOBSON. You expected me!

MAGGIE. Yes. You're in trouble.

HOBSON [*shaking his head, then, as if finding an outlet, pouncing on* ALICE]. What's it got to do with Alice and Vickey? What are they doing here? What's happening to the shop?

ALICE. Tubby Wadlow's looking after it.

HOBSON. And is it Tubby's job to look after the shop?

VICKEY. He'd got no other job. The shop's so slack since Maggie left.

HOBSON [*swelling with rage*]. And do you run that shop? Do you give orders there? Do you decide when you can put your hats on and walk out of it?

MAGGIE. They come out because it's my wedding-day, Father. It's reason enough, and Will and me 'ull do the same for them. We'll close the shop and welcome on their wedding-days.

HOBSON. Their wedding-days! That's a long time off. It'll be many a year before there's another wedding in this family, I give you my word. One daughter defying me is quite enough.

ALBERT. Hadn't we better get to business, sir?

HOBSON. Young man, don't abuse a noble word. You're a lawyer. By your own admission, you're a lawyer. Honest men live by business and lawyers live by law.

ALBERT. In this matter, sir, I am following the instructions of my client, Mr Beenstock, and the remark you have just let fall, before witnesses, appears to me to bear a libellous reflection on the action of my client.

HOBSON. What! So it's libel now. Isn't trespass and . . . and spying on trade secrets enough for you, you blood-sucking——

ALBERT. One moment, Mr Hobson. You can call me what you like——

HOBSON. And I shall. You——

ALBERT. But I wish to remind you, in your own interests, that abuse of a lawyer is remembered in the costs. Now, my client tells me he is prepared to settle this matter out of court. Personally I don't advise him to, because we should probably get higher damages in court. But Mr Beenstock has no desire to be vindictive. He remembers your position, your reputation for respectability, and——

HOBSON. How much?

ALBERT. Er—I beg your pardon?

HOBSON. I'm not so fond of the sound of your voice as you are. What's the figure?

ALBERT. The sum we propose, which will include my ordinary costs, but not any additional costs incurred by your use of defamatory language to me, is one thousand pounds.

HOBSON. What!

MAGGIE. It isn't.

HOBSON. One thousand pounds for tumbling down a cellar! Why, I might have broken my leg.

ALBERT. That is in the nature of an admission, Mr Hobson. Our flour bags saved your legs from fracture and I am therefore inclined to add to the sum I have stated a reasonable estimate of the doctor's bill we have saved you by protecting your legs with our bags.

MAGGIE. Eh, Albert Prosser, I can see you're going to get on in the world, but you needn't be greedy here. That one thousand's too much.

ALBERT. We thought——

MAGGIE. Then you can think again.

FREDDY. But——

MAGGIE. If there are any more signs of greediness from you two, there'll be a counter-action for personal damages due to your criminal carelessness in leaving your cellar flap open.

HOBSON. Maggie, you've saved me. I'll bring that action. I'll show them up.

MAGGIE. You're not damaged, and one lawyer's quite enough. But he'll be more reasonable now. I know perfectly well what Father can afford to pay, and it's not a thousand pounds nor anything like a thousand pounds.

HOBSON. Not so much of your can't afford, Maggie. You'll make me out a pauper.

MAGGIE. You can afford five hundred pounds and you're going to pay five hundred pounds.

HOBSON. Oh, but . . . there's a difference between affording and paying.

MAGGIE. You can go to the courts and be reported in the papers if you like.

HOBSON. It's the principle I care about. I'm being beaten by a lawyer.

VICKEY. Father dear, how can you be beaten when they wanted a thousand pounds and you're only going to give five hundred pounds?

HOBSON. I hadn't thought of that.

VICKEY. It's they who are beaten.

HOBSON. I'd take a good few beatings myself at the price, Vickey. Still, I want this keeping out of court.

ALBERT. Then we can take it as settled?

HOBSON. Do you want to see the money before you believe me? Is that your nasty lawyer's way?

ALBERT. Not at all, Mr Hobson. Your word is as good as your bond.

VICKEY. It's settled! It's settled! Hurrah! Hurrah!

HOBSON. Well, I don't see what you have to cheer about, Vickey. I'm not to be dragged to public scorn, but you know this is a tidy bit of money to be going out of the family.

MAGGIE. It's not going out of the family, Father.

HOBSON. I don't see how you make it out.

MAGGIE. Their wedding-day is not so far off as you thought, now there's the half of five hundred pounds apiece for them to make a start on. [ALBERT *and* ALICE, FRED *and* VICKEY, *stand arm in arm.*

HOBSON. You mean to tell me——

MAGGIE. You won't forget you've passed your word, will you, Father?

HOBSON [*rising*]. I've been diddled. It's a plant. It——

MAGGIE. It takes two daughters off your hands at once, and clears your shop of all the fools of women that used to lumber up the place.

ALICE. It will be much easier for you without us in your way, Father.

HOBSON. Aye, and you can keep out of my way and all. Do you hear that, all of you?

VICKEY. Father . . .!

HOBSON [*picking up his hat*]. I'll run that shop with men and—and I'll show Salford how it should be run. Don't you imagine there'll be room for you when you come home crying and tired of your fine husbands. I'm rid of ye, and it's a lasting riddance, mind. I'll pay this money, that you've robbed me of, and that's the end of it. All of you. You, especially, Maggie. I'm not blind yet, and I can see who 'tis I've got to thank for this. [*He goes to foot of stairs.*

MAGGIE. Don't be vicious, Father.

HOBSON. Will Mossop, I'm sorry for you. Take you for all in all, you're the best of the bunch. You're a backward lad, but you know your trade and it's an honest one. [HOBSON *is going up the stairs.*

ALICE. So does my Albert know his trade.

HOBSON [*half-way upstairs*]. I'll grant you that. He knows his trade. He's good at robbery. And I've to have it on my conscience that my daughter's wed a lawyer and an employer of lawyers.

VICKEY. It didn't worry your conscience to keep us serving in the shop at no wages.

HOBSON. I kept you, didn't I? It's some one else's job to victual you in future. Aye, you may grin, you two, but girls don't live on air.

Your penny buns 'ull cost you tuppence now—and more. Wait till the families begin to come. Don't come to me for keep, that's all.

ALICE. Father!

HOBSON. Aye. You may father me. But that's a piece of work I've finished with. I've done with fathering, and they're beginning it. They'll know what marrying a woman means before so long. They're putting chains upon themselves and I have thrown the shackles off. I've suffered thirty years and more, and I'm a free man from to-day. Lord, what a thing you're taking on! You poor, poor wretches. You're red-nosed robbers, but you're going to pay for it.

[*He opens door and exit.*

MAGGIE. You'd better arrange to get married quick. Alice and Vickey will have a sweet time with him.

FREDDY. Can they go home at all?

MAGGIE. Why not?

FREDDY. After what he said?

MAGGIE. He'll not remember half of it. He's for the Moonraker's now—if there's time. What is the time?

ALBERT. Time we were going, Maggie—you'll be glad to see the back of us. [*He shows* MAGGIE *his watch.*

WILLIE. No. No. I wouldn't dream of asking you to go.

MAGGIE. Then I would. It's high time we turned you out. There are your hats. [*She gets* ALBERT'S *and* FRED'S *hats.*] Good night. [ALBERT *and* FREDDY *go upstairs,* MAGGIE *practically pushing them.*] Good night, Vickey.

VICKEY [*with a quick kiss*]. Good night, Maggie.

[VICKEY *goes upstairs. She and* FREDDY *go out.*

MAGGIE. Good night, Alice.

ALICE. Good night, Maggie. [*The same quick kiss.*] And thank you.

MAGGIE. Oh, that! [*She goes with her to stairs.*] I'll see you again soon, only don't come round here too much, because Will and me's going to be busy, and you'll maybe find enough to do yourselves with getting wed.

ALICE. I dare say. [*Upstairs.*

MAGGIE. Send us word when the day is.

ALBERT. We'll be glad to see you at the wedding.

MAGGIE. We'll come to that. You'll be too grand for us afterwards.

ALBERT. Oh, no, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Well, happen we'll be catching up with you before so long. We're only starting here. Good night.

ALBERT. }
ALICE. } Good night, Maggie.

[*They go out, closing door.* MAGGIE *turns to* WILL, *putting her hands on his shoulders. He starts.*

MAGGIE. Now you've heard what I've said of you to-night. In twenty years you're going to be thought more of than either of your brothers-in-law.

WILLIE. I heard you say it, Maggie.

MAGGIE. And we're to make it good. I'm not a boaster, Will. And it's to be in less than twenty years, and all.

WILLIE. Well, I dunno. They've a long start on us.

MAGGIE. And you've got me. Your slate's in the bedroom. Bring it out. I'll have this table clear by the time you come back.

[*She hustles off the last remains of the meal, putting the flowers on the mantel and takes off cloth, placing it over the back of the chair.* WILL *goes to bedroom and returns with a slate and slate pencil. The slate is covered with writing. He puts it on table.*

MAGGIE. Off with your Sunday coat now. You don't want to make a mess of that. [*He takes coat off and gets rag from behind screen and brings it back to table.*] What are you doing with that mopping rag?

WILLIE. I was going to wash out what's on the slate.

MAGGIE. Let me see it first. That's what you did last night at Tubby's after I came here?

WILLIE. Yes, Maggie.

MAGGIE [*reading*]. "There is always room at the top." [*Washing it out*] Your writing's improving, Will. I'll set you a short copy for to-night, because it's getting late and we've a lot to do in the morning. [*Writing*] "Great things grow from small." Now, then, you can sit down here and copy that. [*He takes her place at the table.* MAGGIE *watches a moment, then goes to fireplace and fingers the flowers.*] I'll put these flowers of Mrs Hepworth's behind the fire, Will. We'll not want litter in the place come working-time to-morrow.

[*She takes up basin, stops, looks at* WILL, *who is bent over his slate, and takes a flower out, throwing the rest behind the fire and going to bedroom with the one.*

WILLIE [*looking up*]. You're saving one.

MAGGIE [*caught in an act of sentiment and apologetically*]. I thought I'd press it in my Bible for a keepsake, Will. I'm not beyond liking to be reminded of this day. [*She looks at screen and yawns.*] Lord, I'm tired. I reckon I'll leave those pots till morning. It's a slackish way of starting, but I don't get married every day.

WILLIE [*industrious at his slate*]. No.

MAGGIE. I'm for my bed. You finish that copy before you come.

WILLIE. Yes, Maggie.

[*Exit* MAGGIE *to bedroom, with the flower. She closes door.* WILL *copies, repeats letters and words as he writes them slowly, finishes, then rises and rakes out fire. He looks*

*shyly at bedroom door, sits and takes his boots off. He rises, boots in hand, moves towards door, hesitates, and turns back, puts boots down at door, then returns to table and takes off his collar. Then hesitates again, finally makes up his mind, puts out light, and lies down on sofa with occasional glances at the bedroom door. At first he faces the fire. He is uncomfortable. He turns over and faces the door. In a minute* MAGGIE *opens the bedroom door. She has a candle and is in a plain calico nightdress. She comes to* WILL, *shines the light on him, takes him by the ear, and returns with him to bedroom.*

## ACT IV

*The scene represents* HOBSON'S *living-room, the door to which was seen in Act I. From inside the room that door is now seen to be at the left, the opposite wall having the fireplace and another door to the house.*

*It is eight o'clock on a morning a year later.*

*In front of the fireplace is a horsehair armchair. Chairs to match are at the table. There are coloured prints of Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort on the walls on each side of the door at the back, and a plain one of Lord Beaconsfield over the fireplace. Antimacassars abound, and the decoration is quaintly ugly. It is an overcrowded, 'cosy' room.* HOBSON *is quite contented with it, and doesn't realize that it is at present very dirty.*

*There is probably a kitchen elsewhere, but* TUBBY WADLOW *is cooking bacon at the fire. He is simultaneously laying breakfast for one on the table. At both proceedings he is a puzzled and incompetent amateur. Presently the left door opens, and* JIM HEELER *appears.*

JIM [*crossing to centre door*]. I'll go straight up to him, Tubby.

TUBBY [*checking him*]. He's getting up, Mr Heeler.

JIM. Getting up! Why, you said——

TUBBY. I told you what he told me to tell you. Run for Doctor MacFarlane, he said. And I ran for Doctor MacFarlane. Now go to Mr Heeler, he said, and tell him I'm very ill, and I came and told you. Then he said he would get up, and I was to have his breakfast ready for him, and he'd see you down here.

JIM. Nonsense, Tubby. Of course, I'll go up to him.

TUBBY. You know what he is, sir. I'll get blamed if you go, and he's short-tempered this morning.

JIM. I don't want to get you into trouble, Tubby. [*He sits.*

TUBBY. Thank you, Mr Heeler.

JIM. I quite thought it was something serious.

TUBBY. If you ask me, it is.

JIM. Which way?

TUBBY. Every way you look at it. Mr Hobson's not his own old self, and the shop's not its own old self, and look at me. Now I ask you, Mr Heeler, man to man, is this work for a foreman shoe-hand? Cooking and laying tables and——

JIM. By all accounts there's not much else for you to do.

TUBBY. There's better things than being a housemaid, if it's only making clogs.

JIM. They tell me clogs are a cut line.

TUBBY. Well, what are you to do? There's nothing else wanted. Hobson's in a bad way, and I'm telling no secret when I say it. It's a fact that's known.

JIM. It's a thousand pities with an old-established trade like this.

TUBBY. And who's to blame?

JIM. I don't think you ought to discuss that with me, Tubby.

TUBBY. Don't you? I'm an old servant of the master's, and I'm sticking to him now when everybody's calling me a doting fool because I don't look after Tubby Wadlow first, and if that don't give me the right to say what I please, I don't know. It's temper's ruining this shop, Mr Heeler. Temper and obstinacy.

JIM. They say in Chapel Street it's Willie Mossop.

TUBBY. Willie's a good lad, though I say it that trained him. He hit us hard, did Willie, but we'd have got round that in time. With care, you understand, and tact. Tact. That's what the gaffer lacks. Miss Maggie, now . . . well, she's a marvel, aye, a fair knock-out. Not slavish, mind you. Stood up to the customers all the time, but she'd a way with her that sold the goods and made them come again for more. Look at us now. Men assistants in the shop.

JIM. Cost more than women.

TUBBY. Cost? They'd be dear at any price. Look here, Mr Heeler, take yourself. When you go to buy a pair of boots do you like to be tried on by a man or a nice soft young woman?

JIM. Well——

TUBBY. There you are. Stands to reason. It's human nature.

JIM. But there are two sides to that, Tubby. Look at the other.

TUBBY. Ladies?

JIM. Yes.

TUBBY. Ladies that are ladies wants trying on by their own sex, and them that aren't buys clogs. It's the good-class trade that pays, and Hobson's have lost it. [*Enter* HOBSON *centre, unshaven, without collar.*

JIM [*with cheerful sympathy*]. Well, Henry!

HOBSON [*with acute melancholy and self-pity*]. Oh, Jim! Oh, Jim! Oh, Jim!

TUBBY. Will you sit on the armchair by the fire or at the table?

HOBSON. The table? Breakfast? Bacon? Bacon, and I'm like this. [JIM *assists him to armchair.*

JIM. When a man's like this he wants a woman about the house, Henry.

HOBSON [*sitting*]. I'll want then.

TUBBY. Shall I go for Miss Maggie, sir?—Mrs Mossop, I mean.

JIM. I think your daughters should be here.

HOBSON. They should. Only they're not. They're married, and I'm deserted by them all and I'll die deserted, then perhaps they'll be sorry for the way they've treated me. Tubby, have you got no work to do in the shop?

TUBBY. I might find some if I looked hard.

HOBSON. Then go and look. And take that bacon with you. I don't like the smell.

TUBBY [*getting bacon*]. Are you sure you wouldn't like Miss Maggie here? I'll go for her and——

HOBSON. Oh, go for her. Go for the devil. What does it matter who you go for? I'm a dying man.

[TUBBY *takes bacon and goes out left.*

JIM. What's all this talk about dying, Henry?

HOBSON. Oh, Jim! Oh, Jim! I've sent for the doctor. We'll know soon how near the end is.

JIM. Well, this is very sudden. You've never been ill in your life.

HOBSON. It's been saved up, and all come now at once.

JIM. What are your symptoms, Henry?

HOBSON. I'm all one symptom, head to foot. I'm frightened of myself, Jim. That's worst. You *would* call me a clean man, Jim?

JIM. Clean? Of course I would. Clean in body and mind.

HOBSON. I'm dirty now. I haven't washed this morning. Couldn't face the water. The only use I saw for water was to drown myself. The same with shaving. I've thrown my razor through the window. Had to, or I'd have cut my throat.

JIM. Oh, come, come!

HOBSON. It's awful. I'll never trust myself again. I'm going to grow a beard—if I live.

JIM. You'll cheat the undertaker, Henry, but I fancy a doctor could improve you. What do you reckon is the cause of it now?

HOBSON. Moonraker's.

JIM. You don't think——

HOBSON. I don't think. I know. I've seen it happen to others, but I never thought that it would come to me.

JIM. Nor me, neither. You're not a toper, Henry. I grant you're regular, but you don't exceed. It's a hard thing if a man can't take a drop of ale without its getting back at him like this. Why, it might be my turn next.

[TUBBY *enters left, showing in* DR MACFARLANE, *a domineering Scotsman of fifty.*

TUBBY. Here's Doctor MacFarlane. [*Exit* TUBBY.

DOCTOR. Good morning, gentleman. Where's my patient?

[*He puts hat on table.*

JIM [*speaking without indicating* HOBSON]. Here. [*He does not rise.*

DOCTOR. Here? Up?

HOBSON. Looks like it.

DOCTOR. And for a patient who's downstairs I'm made to rise from my bed at this hour?

JIM. It's not so early as all that.

DOCTOR. But I've been up all night, sir. Young woman with her first. Are you Mr Hobson?

JIM [*quickly*]. Certainly not. I'm not ill.

DOCTOR. Hum. Not much to choose between you. You've both got your fate written on your faces.

JIM. Do you mean that I——?

DOCTOR. I mean he has and you will.

HOBSON. Doctor, will you attend to me?

DOCTOR. Yes. Now, sir. [*He sits by him and holds his wrist.*

HOBSON. I've never been in a bad way before this morning. Never wanted a doctor in my life.

DOCTOR. You've needed. But you've not sent.

HOBSON. But this morning——

DOCTOR. I ken—well.

HOBSON. What! You know!

DOCTOR. Any fool would ken.

HOBSON. Eh?

DOCTOR. Any fool but one fool, and that's yourself.

HOBSON. You're damned polite.

DOCTOR. If ye want flattery, I dare say ye can get it from your friend. I'm giving you ma medical opinion.

HOBSON. I want your opinion on my complaint, not on my character.

DOCTOR. Your complaint and your character are the same.

HOBSON. Then you'll kindly separate them and you'll tell me——

DOCTOR [*rising and taking up hat*]. I'll tell you nothing, sir. I don't diagnose as my patients wish, but as my intellect and sagacity direct. Good morning to you.

JIM. But you have not diagnosed.

DOCTOR. Sir, if I am to interview a patient in the presence of a third party, the least that third party can do is to keep his mouth shut.

JIM. After that, there's only one thing for it. He shifts or I do.

HOBSON. You'd better go, Jim.

JIM. There are other doctors, Henry.

HOBSON. I'll keep this one. I've got to teach him a lesson. Scotchmen can't come over Salford lads this road.

JIM. If that's it, I'll leave you.

HOBSON. That's it. I can bully as well as a foreigner.

[JIM *goes out left.*

DOCTOR. That's better, Mr Hobson. [*He puts hat down.*

HOBSON. If I'm better, you've not had much to do with it.

DOCTOR. I think my calculated rudeness——

HOBSON. If you calculate your fees at the same rate as your rudeness, they'll be high.

DOCTOR. I calculate by time, Mr Hobson, so we'd better get to business. Will you unbutton your shirt?

HOBSON [*doing it*]. No hanky-panky now.

DOCTOR [*ignoring his remark and examining*]. Aye. It just confirms ma first opinion. Ye've had a breakdown this A.M.?

HOBSON. You might say so.

DOCTOR. Melancholic? Depressed?

HOBSON [*buttoning shirt*]. Question was whether the razor would beat me, or I'd beat razor. I won, that time. The razor's in the yard. But I'll never dare to try shaving myself again.

DOCTOR. And do you seriously require me to tell you the cause, Mr Hobson?

HOBSON. I'm paying thee brass to tell me.

DOCTOR. Chronic alcoholism, if you know what that means.

HOBSON. Aye.

DOCTOR. A serious case.

HOBSON. I know it's serious. What do you think you're here for? It isn't to tell me something I know already. It's to cure me.

DOCTOR. Very well. I will write you a prescription.

[*Sits at table and writes with copying pencil.*

HOBSON. Stop that!

DOCTOR. I beg your pardon?

HOBSON. I won't take it. None of your druggist's muck for me. I'm particular about what I put into my stomach.

DOCTOR. Mr Hobson, if you don't mend your manners, I'll certify you for a lunatic asylum. Are you aware that you've drunk yourself within six months of the grave? You'd a warning this morning that any sane man would listen to, and you're going to listen to it, sir.

HOBSON. By taking your prescription?

DOCTOR. Precisely. You will take this mixture, Mr Hobson, and you will practise total abstinence for the future.

HOBSON. You ask me to give up my reasonable refreshment!

DOCTOR. I forbid alcohol absolutely.

HOBSON. Much use your forbidding is. I've had my liquor for as long as I remember, and I'll have it to the end. If I'm to be beaten by beer I'll die fighting, and I'm none practising unnatural teetotalism for the sake of lengthening out my unalcoholic days. Life's got to be worth living before I'll live it.

DOCTOR [*rising and taking hat again*]. If that's the way you talk, my services are of no use to you.

HOBSON. They're not. I'll pay you on the nail for this.

[*Rising and sorting money from pocket.*

DOCTOR. I congratulate you on the impulse, Mr Hobson.

HOBSON. Nay, it's a fair deal, doctor. I've had value. You've been a tonic to me. When I got up I never thought to see the Moonraker's again, but I'm ready for my early morning draught this minute.

[*Holds out money.*

DOCTOR [*putting hat down and talking earnestly*]. Man, will ye no be warned? Ye pig-headed animal, alcohol is poison to ye, deadly, virulent with a system in the state yours is.

HOBSON. You're getting warm about it. Will you take your fee?

[*Holding out money.*

DOCTOR. Yes. When I've earned it. Put it in your pocket, Mr Hobson. I hae na finished with ye yet.

HOBSON. I thought you had.

DOCTOR. Do ye ken that ye're defying me? Ye'll die fighting, will ye? Aye, it's a gey high-sounding sentiment, ma mannie, but ye'll no dae it, do ye hear! Ye'll no slip from me now. I've got ma grip on ye. Ye'll die sober, and ye'll live the longest time ye can before ye die. Have ye a wife, Mr Hobson? [HOBSON *points upwards.*] In bed?

HOBSON. Higher than that.

DOCTOR. It's a pity. A man like you should keep a wife handy.

HOBSON. I'm not so partial to women.

DOCTOR. Women are a necessity, sir. Have ye no female relative that can manage ye?

HOBSON. Manage?

DOCTOR. Keep her thumb firm on ye?

HOBSON. I've got three daughters, Doctor MacFarlane, and they tried to keep their thumbs on me.

DOCTOR. Well? Where are they?

HOBSON. Married—and queerly married.

DOCTOR. You drove them to it.

HOBSON. They all grew uppish. Maggie worst of all.

DOCTOR. Maggie? Then I'll tell ye what ye'll do, Mr Hobson. You will get Maggie back. At any price. At all costs to your pride, as your medical man I order you to get Maggie back. I don't know Maggie, but I prescribe her, and—damn ye, sir, are ye going to defy me again?

HOBSON. I tell you I won't have it.

DOCTOR. You'll have to have it. You're a dunderheaded lump of obstinacy, but I've taken a fancy to ye, and I decline to let ye kill yeself.

HOBSON. I've escaped from the thraldom of women once, and——

DOCTOR. And a pretty mess you've made of your liberty. Now this Maggie ye mention—if ye'll tell me where she's to be found, I'll just step round and have a crack with her maself, for I've gone beyond the sparing of a bit of trouble over ye.

HOBSON. You'll waste your time.

DOCTOR. I'll cure you, Mr Hobson.

HOBSON. She won't come back.

DOCTOR. Oh! Now that's a possibility. If she's a sensible body I concur with your opinion she'll no come back, but women are a soft-hearted race, and she'll maybe take pity on ye after all.

HOBSON. I want no pity.

DOCTOR. If she's the woman that I take her for ye'll get no pity. Ye'll get discipline. [HOBSON *tries to speak.*] Don't interrupt me, sir. I'm talking.

HOBSON. I've noticed it.

DOCTOR. You asked me for a cure, and Maggie's the name of the cure you need. Maggie, sir, do you hear? Maggie!

[*Enter* MAGGIE *left, in outdoor clothes.*

MAGGIE. What about me?

DOCTOR [*staggered then*]. Are you Maggie?

MAGGIE. I'm Maggie.

DOCTOR. Ye'll do.

HOBSON [*getting his breath*]. What are you doing under my roof?

MAGGIE. I've come because I was fetched.

HOBSON. Who fetched you?

MAGGIE. Tubby Wadlow.

HOBSON [*rising*]. Tubby can quit my shop this minute.

DOCTOR [*putting him back*]. Sit down, Mr Hobson.

MAGGIE. He said you're dangerously ill.

DOCTOR. He is. I'm Doctor MacFarlane. Will you come and live here again?

MAGGIE. I'm married.

DOCTOR. I know that, Mrs——

MAGGIE. Mossop.

DOCTOR. Your father's drinking himself to death, Mrs Mossop.

HOBSON. Look here, Doctor, what's passed between you and me isn't for everybody's ears.

DOCTOR. I judge your daughter's not the sort to want the truth wrapped round with a feather-bed for fear it hits her hard.

MAGGIE [*nodding appreciatively*]. Go on. I'd like to hear it all.

HOBSON. Just nasty-minded curiosity.

DOCTOR. I don't agree with you, Mr Hobson. If Mrs Mossop is to sacrifice her own home to come to you, she's every right to know the reason why.

HOBSON. Sacrifice! If you saw her home you'd find another word than that. Two cellars in Oldfield Road.

MAGGIE. I'm waiting, Doctor.

DOCTOR. I've a constitutional objection to seeing patients slip through ma fingers when it's avoidable, Mrs Mossop, and I'll do ma best for your father, but ma medicine will na do him any good without your medicine to back me up. He needs a tight hand on him all the time.

MAGGIE. I've not same chance I had before I married.

DOCTOR. Ye'll have no chance at all unless ye come and live here. I willna talk about the duty of a daughter because I doubt he's acted badly by ye, but on the broad grounds of humanity, it's saving life if ye'll come——

MAGGIE. I might.

DOCTOR. Nay, but will ye?

MAGGIE. You've told me what you think. The rest's my business.

HOBSON. That's right, Maggie. [*To* DOCTOR] That's what you get for interfering with folks' private affairs. So now you can go, with your tail between your legs, Doctor MacFarlane.

DOCTOR. On the contrary, I am going, Mr Hobson, with the profound conviction that I leave you in excellent hands. One prescription is on the table, Mrs Mossop. The other two are total abstinence and—you.

MAGGIE [*nodding amiably*]. Good morning.

DOCTOR. Good morning.

[*Exit* DOCTOR *left.* MAGGIE *picks up prescription and follows to door.*

MAGGIE. Tubby! [*She stands by door,* TUBBY *just enters inside it.*] Go round to Oldfield Road and ask my husband to come here, and get this made up at Hallow's on your way back.

TUBBY. Yes, Miss—Mrs Mossop.

MAGGIE. Tell Mr Mossop that I want him quick.

[TUBBY *nods and goes.*

HOBSON. Maggie, you know I can't be an abstainer. A man of my habits. At my time of life.

MAGGIE. You can if I come here to make you.

HOBSON. Are you coming?

MAGGIE. I don't know yet. I haven't asked my husband.

HOBSON. You ask Will Mossop! Maggie, I'd better thoughts of you. Making an excuse like that to me. If you want to come you'll come so what Will Mossop says and well you know it.

MAGGIE. I don't want to come, Father. I expect no holiday existence here with you to keep in health. But if Will tells me it's my duty I shall come.

HOBSON. You know as well as I do asking Will's a matter of form.

MAGGIE. Matter of form! My husband a matter of form! He's the——

HOBSON. I dare say, but he is not the man that wears the breeches at your house.

MAGGIE. My husband's my husband, Father, so whatever else he is. And my home's my home, and all and what you said of it now to Doctor MacFarlane's a thing you'll pay for. It's no gift to a married woman to come back to the home she's shut of.

HOBSON. Look here, Maggie, you're talking straight and I'll talk straight and all. When I'm set I'm set. You're coming here. I didn't want you when that doctor said it, but, by gum, I want you now. It's been my daughters' hobby crossing me. Now you'll come and look after me.

MAGGIE. All of us?

HOBSON. No. Not all of you. You're eldest

MAGGIE. There's another man with claims on me.

HOBSON. I'll give him claims. Aren't I your father?

[ALICE *enters left. She is rather elaborately dressed for so early in the day, and languidly haughty.*

MAGGIE. And I'm not your only daughter.

ALICE. You been here long, Maggie?

MAGGIE. A while.

ALICE. Ah, well, a fashionable solicitor's wife doesn't rise so early as the wife of a working cobbler. You'd be up when Tubby came.

MAGGIE. A couple of hours earlier.

ALICE. You're looking all right, Father. You've quite a colour.

HOBSON. I'm very ill.

MAGGIE. He's not so well, Alice. The doctor says one of us must come and live here to look after him.

ALICE. I live in the Crescent myself.

MAGGIE. I've heard it was that way on. Somebody's home will have to go.

ALICE. I don't think I can be expected to come back to this after what I've been used to lately.

HOBSON. Alice!

ALICE. Well, I say it ought to be Maggie, Father. She's the eldest.

HOBSON. And I say you're——

[*What she is we don't learn, as* VICKEY *enters effectively and goes effusively to* HOBSON.

VICKEY. Father, you're ill! [*Embracing him.*

HOBSON. Vickey! My baby! At last I find a daughter who cares for me.

VICKEY. Of course I care. Don't the others?

[*Releasing herself from his grasp.*

HOBSON. You will live with me, Vickey, won't you?

VICKEY. What? [*She stands away from him.*

MAGGIE. One of us is needed to look after him.

VICKEY. Oh, but it can't be me. In my circumstances, Maggie!

MAGGIE. What circumstances?

ALICE. Don't you know?

MAGGIE. No. [VICKEY *whispers to* MAGGIE.

HOBSON. What's the matter! What are you all whispering about?

MAGGIE. Father, don't you think you ought to put a collar on before Will comes?

HOBSON. Put a collar on for Will Mossop? There's something wrong with your sense of proportion, my girl.

VICKEY. You're always pretending to folk about your husband, Maggie, but you needn't keep it up with us. We know Will here.

MAGGIE. Father, either I can go home or you can go and put a collar on for Will. I'll have him treated with respect.

ALICE. I expect you'd put a collar on in any case, Father.

HOBSON. Of course I should. I'm going to put a collar on. But understand me, Maggie, it's not for the sake of Will Mossop. It's because my neck is cold. [*Exit* HOBSON *centre.*

MAGGIE. Now, then, which of us is it to be?

VICKEY. It's no use looking at me like that, Maggie. I've told you I'm expecting.

MAGGIE. I don't see that that rules you out. It might happen to any of us.

ALICE. Maggie!

MAGGIE. What's the matter? Children do happen to married women, and we're all married.

ALICE. Well, I'm not going to break my home up, and that's flat.

VICKEY. My child comes first with me.

MAGGIE. I see. You've got a house of furniture, and you've got a child coming, so Father can drink himself to death for you.

ALICE. That's not fair speaking. I'd come if there were no one else. You know very well it's your duty, Maggie.

VICKEY. Duty? I should think it 'ud be a pleasure to live here after a year of two cellars.

MAGGIE. I've had thirty years of the pleasure of living with Father, thanks.

ALICE. Do you mean to say you won't come?

MAGGIE. It isn't for me to say at all. It's for my husband.

VICKEY. Oh, do stop talking about your husband. If Alice and I don't need to ask our husbands, I'm sure you never need ask yours. Will Mossop hasn't the spirit of a louse, and we know it as well as you do.

MAGGIE. Maybe Will's come on since you saw him, Vickey. It's getting a while ago. There he is now in the shop. I'll go and put it to him. [*Exit* MAGGIE *left.*

VICKEY. Stop her! [*Going to door.*

ALICE [*detaining her*]. Let her do it in her own way. I'm not coming back here.

VICKEY. Nor me.

ALICE. There's only Maggie for it.

VICKEY. Yes. But we've got to be careful, Alice. She mustn't have things too much her way.

ALICE. It's our way as well, isn't it?

VICKEY. Not coming is our way. But when she's with him alone and we're not—— [*Stopping.*

ALICE. Yes.

VICKEY. Can't you see what I'm thinking, Alice? It is so difficult to say. Suppose poor Father gets worse and they are here, Maggie and Will, and you and I—out of sight and out of mind. Can't you see what I mean?

ALICE. He might leave them his money?

VICKEY. That would be most unfair to us.

ALICE. Father must make his will at once. Albert shall draw it up.

VICKEY. That's it, Alice. And don't let's leave Maggie too long with Will. She's only telling him what to say, and then she'll pretend he thought of it himself. [*She opens door left.*] Why, Will, what are you doing up the ladder?

WILLIE [*off left*]. I'm looking over the stock.

VICKEY [*indignantly*]. It's Father's stock, not yours.

WILLIE. That's so. But if I'm to come into a thing I like to know what I'm coming into.

ALICE. That's never Willie Mossop.

VICKEY [*still by door*]. Are you coming into this?

[WILL *enters left.* MAGGIE *follows him. He is not aggressive,*

*but he is prosperous and has self-confidence. Against* ALICE *and* VICKEY *he is consciously on his mettle.*

WILLIE. That's the proposal, isn't it?

VICKEY. I didn't know it was.

WILLIE. Now, then, Maggie, go and bring your father down and be sharp. I'm busy at my shop, so what they are at his. [MAGGIE *takes* WILL'S *hat off and puts it on settee, then exits centre.*] It's been a good business in its day, too, has Hobson's.

ALICE. What on earth do you mean? It's a good business still.

WILLIE. You try to sell it, and you'd learn. Stock and goodwill 'ud fetch about two hundred.

VICKEY. Don't talk so foolish, Will. Two hundred for a business like Father's!

WILLIE. Two hundred as it is. Not as it was in our time, Vickey.

ALICE. Do you mean to tell me Father isn't rich?

WILLIE. If you'd not married into the law you'd know what they think of your father to-day in trading circles. Vickey ought to know. Her husband's in trade.

VICKEY [*indignantly*]. My Fred in trade!

WILLIE. Isn't he?

VICKEY. He's in the wholesale. That's business, not trade. And the value of Father's shop is no affair of yours, Will Mossop.

WILLIE. Now I thought maybe it was. If Maggie and me are coming here——

VICKEY. You're coming to look after Father.

WILLIE. Maggie can do that with one hand tied behind her back. I'll look after the business.

ALICE. You'll do what's arranged for you.

WILLIE. I'll do the arranging, Alice. If we come here, we come here on my terms.

VICKEY. They'll be fair terms.

WILLIE. I'll see they're fair to me and Maggie.

ALICE. Will Mossop, do you know who you're talking to?

WILLIE. Aye. My wife's young sisters. Times have changed a bit since you used to order me about this shop, haven't they, Alice?

ALICE. Yes. I'm Mrs Albert Prosser now.

WILLIE. So you are, to outsiders. And you'd be surprised the number of people that call me Mr Mossop now. We do get on in the world, don't we?

VICKEY. Some folks get on too fast.

WILLIE. It's a matter of opinion. I know Maggie and me gave both of you a big leg up when we arranged your marriage portions, but I dunno that we're grudging you the sudden lift you got.

[*Enter* HOBSON *and* MAGGIE *centre.*

WILLIE. Good morning, Father. I'm sorry to hear you're not so well.

HOBSON. I'm a changed man, Will.

[*He comes down and sits on armchair.*

WILLIE. There used to be room for improvement.

HOBSON. What! [*He starts up.*

MAGGIE. Sit down, Father.

WILLIE. Aye. Don't let us be too long about this. You've kept me waiting now a good while, and my time's valuable. I'm busy at my shop.

HOBSON. Is your shop more important than my life?

WILLIE. That's a bit like asking if a pound of tea weighs heavier than a pound of lead. I'm worrited about your life because it worrits Maggie, but I'm none worrited that bad I'll see my business suffer for the sake of you.

HOBSON. This isn't what I've a right to expect from you, Will.

WILLIE. You've no *right* to expect I care whether you sink or swim.

MAGGIE. Will!

WILLIE. What's to do? You told me to take a high hand, didn't you?

ALICE. And we're to stay here and watch Maggie and Will abusing Father when he's ill.

WILLIE. No need for you to stay.

HOBSON. That's a true word, Will Mossop.

VICKEY. Father! You take his side against your flesh and blood.

HOBSON. That doesn't come too well from you, my girl. Neither of you would leave your homes to come to care for me. You're not for me, so you're against me.

ALICE. We're not against you, Father. We want to stay and see that Will deals fairly by you.

HOBSON. Oh, I'm not capable of looking after myself, amn't I? I've to be protected by you girls lest I'm overreached, and overreached by whom? By Willie Mossop! I may be ailing, but I've fight enough left in me for a dozen such as him, and if you're thinking that the manhood's gone from me, you can go and think it somewhere else than in my house.

VICKEY. But Father—dear Father——

HOBSON. I'm not so dear to you if you'd to think twice about coming here to do for me, let alone jibbing at it the way you did. A proper daughter would have jumped—aye, skipped like a calf by the cedars of Lebanon—at the thought of being helpful to her father.

ALICE. Did Maggie skip?

HOBSON. She's a bit ancient for skipping exercise, is Maggie; but she's coming round to reconcilement with the thought of living here,

and that is more than you are doing, Alice, isn't it? Eh? Are you willing to come?

ALICE [*sullenly*]. No.

HOBSON. Or you, Vickey?

VICKEY. It's my child, Father. I——

HOBSON. Never mind what it is. Are you for coming or not?

VICKEY. No.

HOBSON. Then you that aren't willing can leave me to talk with them that are.

ALICE. Do you mean that we're to go?

HOBSON. I understand you've homes to go to.

ALICE. Oh, Father!

HOBSON. Open the door for them, Will.

[WILL *rises and opens door.* ALICE *and* VICKEY *stare in silent anger. Then* ALICE *sweeps to her gloves on the table.*

ALICE. Vickey! [ALICE *moves on towards door.*

VICKEY. Well, I don't know!

MAGGIE [*from her chair by the fireplace*]. We'll be glad to see you here at tea-time on a Sunday afternoon if you'll condescend to come sometimes.

VICKEY. Beggars on horseback. [VICKEY *and* ALICE *pass out.*

WILL [*closing door*]. Nay, come, there's no ill-will. [*He sits.*

HOBSON. Now, my lad, I'll tell you what I'll do.

WILLIE. Aye, we can come to grips better now there are no fine ladies about.

HOBSON. They've got stiff necks with pride, and the difference between you two and them's a thing I ought to mark and that I'm going to mark. There's times for holding back and times for letting loose, and being generous. Now, you're coming here, to this house, both of you, and you can have the back bedroom for your own and the use of this room split along with me. Maggie 'ull keep house, and if she's time to spare she can lend a hand in the shop. I'm finding Will a job. You can come back to your old bench in the cellar, Will, and I'll pay you the old wage of eighteen shillings a week and you and me 'ull go equal whacks in the cost of the housekeeping, and if that's not handsome, I dunno what is. I'm finding you a house rent free and paying half the keep of your wife.

WILLIE. Come home, Maggie. [*He rises.*

MAGGIE. I think I'll have to. [*She rises.*

HOBSON. Whatever's the hurry for?

WILLIE. It may be news to you, but I've a business round in Oldfield Road, and I'm neglecting it with wasting my time here.

HOBSON. Wasting time? Maggie, what's the matter with Will? I've made him a proposal. [WILL *is by door.*

MAGGIE. He's a shop of his own to see to, Father.

HOBSON [*incredulous*]. A man who's offered a job at Hobson's doesn't want to worry with a shop of his own in a wretched cellar in Oldfield Road.

WILLIE. Shall I tell him, Maggie, or shall we go?

HOBSON. Go! I don't want to keep a man who——

MAGGIE. If he goes, I go with him, Father. You'd better speak out, Will.

WILLIE. All right, I will. We've been a year in yon wretched cellar, and do you know what we've done? We've paid off Mrs Hepworth what she lent us for our start and made a bit o' brass on top o' that. We've got your high-class trade away from you. That shop's a cellar, and as you say, it's wretched, but they come to us in it, and they don't come to you. Your trade's gone down till all you sell is clogs. You've got no trade, and me and Maggie's got it all, and now you're on your bended knees to her to come and live with you, and all you think to offer me is my old job at eighteen shillings a week. Me that's the owner of a business that is starving yours to death.

HOBSON. But—but—you're Will Mossop, you're my old shoe hand!

WILLIE. Aye. I were, but I've moved on a bit since then. Your daughter married me and set about my education. And—and now I'll tell you what I'll do and it'll be the handsome thing and all from me to you. I'll close my shop——

HOBSON. Oh! That doesn't sound like doing so well.

WILLIE. I'm doing well, but I'll do better here. I'll transfer to this address and what I'll do that's generous is this: I'll take you into partnership and give you your half-share on the condition you're sleeping partner and you don't try interference on with me.

HOBSON. A partner! You—here——

WILLIE. William Mossop, late Hobson, is the name this shop 'ull have.

MAGGIE. Wait a bit, Will. I don't agree to that.

HOBSON. Oh, so you have piped up at last. I began to think you'd both lost your senses together.

MAGGIE. It had better not be "late Hobson."

WILLIE. Well, I meant it should.

HOBSON. Just wait a bit. I want to know if I'm taking this in aright. I'm to be given a half-share in my own business on condition I take no part in running it. Is that what you said?

WILLIE. That's it.

HOBSON. Well, I've heard of impudence before, but——

MAGGIE. It's all right, Father.

HOBSON. But did you hear what he said?

MAGGIE. Yes. That's settled. Quite settled, Father. It's only

the name we're arguing about. I won't have "late Hobson's," Will.

HOBSON. I'm not dead, yet, my lad, and I'll show you I'm not.

MAGGIE. I think Hobson and Mossop is best.

HOBSON. His name on my sign-board!

WILLIE. The best I'll do is this: Mossop and Hobson.

MAGGIE. No.

WILLIE. Mossop and Hobson, or it's Oldfield Road for us, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Very well. Mossop and Hobson.

HOBSON. But——

WILLIE [*opening door and looking through*]. I'll make some alterations in this shop, and all. I will so.

[*He goes through door and returns at once with a battered cane chair.*

HOBSON. Alterations in my shop!

WILLIE. In mine. Look at that chair. How can you expect the high-class customers to come and sit on a chair like that? Why, we'd only a cellar, but they did sit on cretonne for their trying on.

HOBSON. Cretonne! It's pampering folk.

WILLIE. Cretonne for a cellar, and morocco for this shop. Folk like to be pampered. Pampering pays. [*He takes the chair out and returns immediately.*] There'll be a carpet on that floor, too.

HOBSON. Carpet! Morocco! Young man, do you think this shop is in Saint Ann's Square, Manchester?

WILLIE. Not yet. But it is going to be.

HOBSON. What does he mean? [*Appealing to heaven.*

WILLIE. It's no farther from Chapel Street to Saint Ann's Square than it is from Oldfield Road to Chapel Street. I've done one jump in a year, and if I wait a bit I'll do the other. Maggie, I reckon your father could do with a bit of fresh air after this. I dare say it's come sudden to him. Suppose you walk with him to Albert Prosser's office and get Albert to draw up the deed of partnership.

HOBSON [*looking pathetically first at* MAGGIE, *then at* WILLIE, *rising obediently*]. I'll go and get my hat. [*Exit* HOBSON *centre.*

WILLIE. He's crushed-like, Maggie. I'm afraid I bore on him too hard.

MAGGIE. You needn't be.

WILLIE. I said such things to him, and they sounded as if I meant them, too.

MAGGIE. Didn't you?

WILLIE. Did I? Yes . . . I suppose I did. That's just the worst . . . from me to him. You told me to be strong and use the power that's come to me through you, but he's the old master, and——

MAGGIE. And you're the new.

WILLIE. Master of Hobson's! It's an outrageous big idea. Did I sound confident, Maggie?

MAGGIE. You did all right.

WILLIE. Eh, but I weren't by half so certain as I sounded. Words came from my mouth that made me jump at my own boldness, and when it came to facing you about the name, I tell you I fair trembled in my shoes. I was carried away like, or I'd not have dared to cross you, Maggie.

MAGGIE. Don't spoil it, Will. You're the man I've made you, and I'm proud.

WILLIE. Thy pride is not in same street, lass, with the pride I have in you. And that reminds me. I've a job to see to.

MAGGIE. What job?

WILLIE. Oh—about the improvements.

MAGGIE. You'll not do owt without consulting me.

WILLIE. I'll do this, lass. [*Goes to and takes her hand.*

MAGGIE. What are you doing? You leave my wedding-ring alone. [*Wrenches hand free.*

WILLIE. You've worn a brass one long enough.

MAGGIE. I'll wear that ring for ever, Will.

WILLIE. I was for getting you a proper one, Maggie.

MAGGIE. I'm not preventing you. I'll wear your gold for show, but that brass stays where you put it, Will, and if we get too rich and proud we'll just sit down together quiet and take a long look at it, so as we'll not forget the truth about ourselves. . . . Eh, lad! [*She touches him affectionately.*

WILLIE. Eh, lass! [*He kisses her.*

[*Enter* HOBSON *centre, with his hat on.*

MAGGIE. Ready, Father. Come along to Albert's.

HOBSON [*meekly*]. Yes, Maggie.

[MAGGIE *and* HOBSON *cross below* WILL *and go out left.* WILL *comes down with amazement, triumph and incredulity written on his face, and attempts to express the inexpressible by saying—*

WILLIE. Well, by gum! [*He turns to follow the others.*

# THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

## By ST JOHN HANKIN

*First produced at the Royal Court Theatre, London, September 25, 1905*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Samuel Jackson, *of Jackson, Hartopp, and Jackson, cloth-makers; a pompous man of fifty-five*
Maria, *his wife, a fat, comfortable woman of fifty-three*
Henry, *their eldest son, partner in the firm, thirty-one*
Eustace, *their second son, the ne'er-do-well, twenty-nine*
Violet, *their daughter, twenty-eight*
Sir John Faringford, Bart., *a local magnate, forty-eight*
Lady Faringford, *his wife, forty-six*
Stella Faringford, *their daughter, nineteen*
Dr Glaisher, *the local medical man, forty-four*
The Rev. Cyril Pratt, *the Rector, sixty*
Mrs Pratt, *his wife, fifty-four*
Baines, *butler at the Jacksons'*
Two Footmen

*The action of the play takes place at Chedleigh Court, the Jacksons' house in Gloucestershire. Chedleigh, as everybody knows, has long been famous for its cloth-mills.*

*THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL* is undoubtedly the best play of the late St John Hankin, although *The Two Mr Wetherbys*, *The Charity that Began at Home*, *The Cassilis Engagement*, and *The Last of the De Mullins* are all distinguished by brilliant dialogue and fecundity of ideas. "Hankin was a stylist," says a noted critic, "and gave us in *The Return of the Prodigal*, besides that sort of ood talk which is real talk, plus imagination, a real as opposed to the mantic ne'er-do-well." The fourth-act scene between the Prodigal d his unmarried stay-at-home sister is a little gem of unforced emotion, ight but all-sufficing exposition in a few words of the tragedy of the

unwanted woman. Hankin had a trick of diving lightly to the depths, of showing tragedy through comedy.

St John Hankin was a dramatist of ideas. All his plays throw a searching light upon the Society of his age, and from his ideas the characters and incidents spring. His stage figures, therefore, seem to us rather 'manufactured'; their author always remains humorously detached or somewhat cynically aloof, an attitude which forms an interesting contrast to the stern-eyed kindliness of Mr Galsworthy.

Hankin's plays are serious—in the Shavian sense—and the critics are tempted to be unduly solemn in analysing them. Yet they are excellent comedy, often gay to the point of frivolity, and intensely amusing. His "Dramatic Sequels," which appeared in *Punch* week by week, are delightful, as is his one-act play *The Constant Lover*.

# ACT I

SCENE: *The* JACKSONS' *drawing-room at Chedleigh, a handsome room, suggests opulence rather than taste. Not vulgar, but not distinguished. Too full of furniture, pictures, knick-knacks, chair-covers, plants in pots. Too full of everything. There is a door up left from hall. Fireplace left further down stage, with rather elaborate overmantel of wood painted white. A sofa sticks out square from left wall above fireplace. Between it and door is a screen with a piece of drapery sloping over it. Below fireplace and nearest to footlights one of those upright Dutch writing-tables with a front which lets down flat when you want to write. It is open. In the centre wall two windows, curtains drawn as it is evening. Between them against wall writing-table with chair in front of it, back to audience. Up right grand piano, the keyboard being at the end furthest from footlights. A small table stands by the side of the piano at the point where the body narrows. On this and on the piano itself are large pots of plants in flower, photograph-frames, and other inappropriate things. Below piano, between it and footlights, and therefore mainly screening the player from the audience, a palm or two in tall pots. Below this a settee holding two. There are also plants in the fireplace, as it is summer, and that is the* JACKSONS' *conception of the proper way to adorn a fireplace and a suitable place for growing plants. Easy-chairs all over the place. The room is lighted by electricity, but only a few of the lights are turned on.*

*When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then door opens, and enter* LADY FARINGFORD, *her daughter* STELLA, MRS PRATT, VIOLET JACKSON, *and, after an interval,* MRS JACKSON.

MRS JACKSON [*without, in her loud cheery voice*]. You won't stay too long over your cigars will you, Samuel? [*Entering and coming down*] I always notice the gentlemen stay far too long in the dining-room unless they're specially told not to. Now, Lady Faringford, where will you sit? Try this sofa.

LADY FARINGFORD [*sitting in corner of sofa furthest from fireplace*]. Thank you.

MRS JACKSON. That's right. Mrs Pratt, where shall I put you? No, don't go there. That's such a long way off. Come here. [*Drags*

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*up armchair near* LADY FARINGFORD *with hospitable inelegance.* MRS PRATT *sits.*] Are you all right, Stella?

STELLA [*who has taken place on settee*]. Quite, thanks, Mrs Jackson.

VIOLET. Where will you go, Mother?

MRS JACKSON. I'm going to sit here. Wait till I turn on some more light. [*Goes to door and does so.*] That's better!

[MRS JACKSON *takes seat by* LADY FARINGFORD. VIOLET *sits by* STELLA *and quietly begins to knit.*

LADY FARINGFORD. I do envy you your electric light, Mrs Jackson. Lamps are so troublesome. The servants are always setting themselves on fire with them.

MRS JACKSON [*comfortably*]. It *is* convenient, isn't it?

LADY FARINGFORD. How long have you had it?

MRS JACKSON. Only about eighteen months. We had it brought here at the same time that they were putting it in at the mill. It seemed a pity not to as it was so close. And now I don't know what we should do without it.

MRS PRATT. I saw it was all on at the mill as we passed to-night.

[STELLA *rises and strolls about.*

MRS JACKSON. Yes. They can work much later now it's been put in. That was Henry's idea. It was almost impossible to work overtime profitably before on account of the light. Now the mill often works night and day when there's a pressure.

STELLA. Surely the workmen must sleep sometimes?

MRS JACKSON. They have different sets of workmen, I believe. But you must ask Henry. He knows all about it.

LADY FARINGFORD. Mr Jackson seems pretty cheerful about his election prospects.

MRS JACKSON. Yes. I do hope he'll get in. It will be such an amusement for him. [STELLA *at top table.*

MRS PRATT. It would certainly be most regrettable if Mr Ling were elected. He is a Dissenter. The Rector says a clergyman should have no politics, but I say a clergyman with no politics is never made a bishop.

LADY FARINGFORD. I trust the Rector will not allow Mr Ling to use the Parish Room for any of his meetings.

MRS PRATT. I'm afraid he will. He says he can't make distinctions between the two parties. If he lends the room to one he must lend it to the other.

LADY FARINGFORD. Then he had better lend it to neither. That will answer the purpose quite well. For Mr Jackson can easily hire some place for his meetings, while Mr Ling cannot. It is such a comfort that all the rich people about here are Conservatives. [STELLA *at table.*] But I believe the same thing may be noticed in other parts of the country. It almost seems like a special Providence.

MRS JACKSON. I hope Sir John thinks my husband will get in?

LADY FARINGFORD. Oh, yes, I think so. It's unfortunate that Mr Ling is so popular. Only with quite vulgar people, no doubt, Non-conformists and so forth. But even they have votes unfortunately. Still, Mr Jackson employs a large number of people, and they will vote for him of course—or what's the use of being an employer? And if he is sufficiently liberal with his subscriptions——

MRS JACKSON. I believe my husband subscribes to *everything*.

LADY FARINGFORD. Then I'm sure he'll get in. It's a pity he won't have the Illingtons' support, by the way. [*Enter* BUTLER *and* FOOTMAN. *The* FOOTMAN *first, carrying tray with five empty cups, then* BUTLER *with tray with coffee, cream, and sugar.*] They have a great deal of influence in their part of the County.

MRS PRATT [*horrified*]. Surely Sir James hasn't turned Radical?

LADY FARINGFORD. No, no. Not so bad as *that*! But I hear he's quite ruined. His racing-stable has cost him a fortune in the last few years, and he's never won a single race. Braden will be to let in the autumn.

MRS JACKSON. Poor Sir James. He will feel parting with the place dreadfully.

LADY FARINGFORD. It's his own fault. He ought never to have made that absurd marriage. Mary Illington—she was Mary Tremayne, you know—one of the Wiltshire Tremaynes—hadn't a sixpence. What will become of that boy of theirs at Eton I can't think. They'll never be able to pay his school bills.

MRS JACKSON. Public schools *are* dreadfully expensive, aren't they? I remember when Eustace, my second boy, was at Harrow—Henry was never at a public school—his bills were terribly high.

MRS PRATT. I wonder whom we shall have at Braden. I do hope they will be Church people. The Scalebys [STELLA *by her mother*] who took Astley Park, play tennis on Sundays, and seem to me to be little better than heathens. It sets such a bad example.

LADY FARINGFORD. The County is changing sadly. Half the old houses have changed hands, and the new people are usually quite dreadful. If this sort of thing goes on there won't be a single person fit to speak to within twenty miles. [*Pause.*

STELLA [*to* VIOLET]. What are you working at?

VIOLET. A pair of socks for Old Allen. I always give him a pair for his birthday. That's about a month from now.

MRS PRATT. I hope you and Mrs Jackson have got a lot of things ready for the Mission Room Fund Bazaar, Violet? We want to clear off our debt, and if possible have something in hand as well.

VIOLET. Oh, yes! I've done some things and so has Mother. I'll send them up in a day or two.

MRS PRATT. And thank *you* so much, Lady Faringford, for the embroidered teacloth you sent. It is *sure* to sell!

LADY FARINGFORD. Let us hope so. It's extremely ugly. I bought it at the Kettlewell sale of work last year, intending to give it to my poor sister Adelaide. But afterwards I hadn't the heart. So I sent it to your bazaar instead. [*Pause.*

MRS JACKSON. Vi dear, won't you play us something?

STELLA. Do, Vi. We never have any music at the Hall now Fräulein Schmidt has gone.

VIOLET. Very well, if you'd really like it.

[VIOLET *moves to piano with* STELLA.

LADY FARINGFORD [*to* MRS JACKSON]. You remember her? She was Stella's governess. Quite an intelligent good creature. But I dare say you never met her. She never used to come down to dinner.

[VIOLET *begins to hunt through music.*

LADY FARINGFORD. I always think German governesses so much more satisfactory than English. You see, there's never any question about having to treat *them* as ladies. And then they're always so plain. That's a great advantage. And German is such a useful language, far more useful for a young girl than French. There are so many more books she can be allowed to read in it. French can be learnt later—and should be in my opinion.

MRS PRATT. I quite agree with you, Lady Faringford. But the Rector is less strict in these matters. He allowed my girls to begin French directly they went to school, at Miss Thursby's. But I'm bound to say they never seem to have learnt any. So perhaps it did no harm.

MRS JACKSON. Yes, I have always heard Miss Thursby's was an excellent school.

[VIOLET, *having finished her search, puts a piece of music on piano and begins to play the second movement of Beethoven's twenty-seventh sonata.*

[*Enter* BAINES.

[*She stops.*

BAINES [*going up to* MRS PRATT]. If you please, madam, Simmonds is here asking if you could see him. They sent him on from the Rectory.

MRS PRATT. Simmonds? Did he say his business?

BAINES [*coughs discreetly*]. Something about Mrs Simmonds, I think, madam.

MRS PRATT. Of course. I remember. I will come in a moment. [*Rising*] You'll excuse me, won't you, dear Mrs Jackson? It's Mrs Simmonds. Foolish woman, she's had another baby. Her husband is in the hall. I shall probably have to run over to the Rectory for some things for her.

MRS JACKSON [*rising at once*]. Oh, no, you mustn't do that. I am sure we have everything necessary here, soup and jelly and flannel and anything else you think wise. And of course they will want some money. I had better come and see Simmonds with you. Then we can tell the housekeeper to put things together for him.

MRS PRATT. But it's giving you so much trouble.

MRS JACKSON. Not in the least. It's no trouble. And I can't have you running away and leaving us before the Rector has finished his cigar. That would never do.

VIOLET [*rising*]. Can I do anything, Mother?

MRS JACKSON. No, dear. I can manage quite well. You stay here and entertain Lady Faringford and Stella. We shan't be five minutes.

[*Exeunt* MRS JACKSON *and* MRS PRATT *shown out by* BAINES.

VIOLET [*coming down stage*]. Poor Mrs Simmonds. I do hope the baby will be all right.

LADY FARINGFORD. I have no doubt it will. When people have far more children already than is either convenient or necessary, their babies always exhibit extraordinary vitality. Nothing seems to kill them. But you were going to play to us, dear.

[VIOLET *goes to piano again and begins to play. After a few moments* LADY FARINGFORD *beckons to* STELLA, *who rises and sits by her mother.* LADY FARINGFORD *begins to talk under cover of the music.*

LADY FARINGFORD. By the way, Stella, how are things going between you and Henry?

STELLA [*who has been absorbed in the music, turns to* LADY FARINGFORD *quickly*]. What do you mean, Mother?

LADY FARINGFORD. Has he asked you to marry him yet?

STELLA. No.

LADY FARINGFORD. Strange! I thought he would have done so before now. I have given him several opportunities.

STELLA. Mother!

LADY FARINGFORD. He is going to, I suppose?

STELLA. I don't know.

LADY FARINGFORD. Nonsense, child. Of course you do. A girl always knows when a man wants to propose to her, unless she is perfectly idiotic. He will certainly propose if you give him proper encouragement. And when he does you will accept him.

STELLA [*thoughtfully*]. I'm not sure.

LADY FARINGFORD. Not sure? Why not? You like him, don't you? [*Three or four loud chords on piano.*] I can't think who invented music after dinner. One can hardly hear oneself speak. As I was saying, you like him?

STELLA. Oh, yes! I like him.

LADY FARINGFORD. Then of course you will accept him. When a man proposes to a girl and she likes him and he is well off and otherwise eligible she should always accept him.

STELLA [*hesitates*]. I don't love him, Mother.

LADY FARINGFORD. My dear, you must not expect impossibilities. Love matches aren't very common among people of our class. And they're by no means always successful either. Quite the contrary. If you marry a man you like you may come to love him—in time. But if you marry a man you love you may easily come to loathe him.

[*Pause.*

STELLA [*sighs*]. Well, I suppose I shall have to marry him in the end.

LADY FARINGFORD. Of course you will. And I'm sure you might do a great deal worse. The Jacksons are really very well off. The business has grown enormously in the past few years. What can be keeping Mrs Jackson so long? Since she left this room she has had time to pauperize the entire village.

STELLA. It will take a little time to get the things together, I suppose, for poor Mrs Simmonds.

LADY FARINGFORD. As to being in love, that is a thing to which people attach far too much importance. Of course the Jacksons are *parvenus*. But everybody one meets nowadays is either a *parvenu* or a pauper. And really girls are so numerous just now they can't afford to be as particular as they were. Henry is the only son.

STELLA. No, Mother. There's Eustace.

LADY FARINGFORD. I don't count Eustace. He went away years ago—to one of the Colonies, I believe—and doubtless came to a bad end. Probably he's dead by now.

STELLA. Mother! How can you say such terrible things!

LADY FARINGFORD. Nonsense. Of course he's dead. And a very good thing too. Really, what a noise our good Violet is making—— If he weren't dead one would have heard something of him. That sort of young man always makes himself felt by his relations as long as the breath's in his body.

STELLA. But if he's abroad——

LADY FARINGFORD. Then he would write—for money. People in the Colonies always do write for money. You don't remember him, do you?

STELLA. Hardly at all. I've seen him, of course.

LADY FARINGFORD. Ah! He was a handsome fellow. Clever too. But a thorough detrimental. It's just as well he went to the Colonies. No, my dear, you can't do better than accept Henry. He'll be quite a rich man some day, and he's really very fairly presentable. And his father will get into Parliament. Not that that means anything nowadays. [*Door opens. Men's voices without.*] Here he is.

[*Enter* SIR JOHN FARINGFORD, *a little bald, the* RECTOR, *a*

*little grey*, MR JACKSON, *very portly and pompous, and* HENRY, *his son.*

MR JACKSON. Hullo, all alone, Lady Faringford? What's become of Maria—and Mrs Pratt?

VIOLET [*rising from piano*]. Simmonds came to ask if he could see Mrs Pratt. Mrs Simmonds is ill. Mother and Mrs Pratt are putting some things together for him to take to her.

LADY FARINGFORD. Your daughter has been entertaining us with her charming music while Mrs Jackson was away. What was that little piece you were playing, dear?

VIOLET. A sonata of Beethoven, Lady Faringford.

LADY FARINGFORD. Indeed? Very pretty.

THE RECTOR. You are going to play at our next parish concert I hope, Miss Jackson?

VIOLET. Yes. Mrs Pratt and I have been getting out the programme.

SIR JOHN. Miss Jackson is a tower of strength in the musical line. Stella hardly plays a note. I always tell my wife it's the result of having had a German governess. How can you expect a child to learn music in German?

LADY FARINGFORD [*rising*]. I believe all modern music is written in German. It certainly sounds like it.

[LADY FARINGFORD *goes up stage, sits and begins to talk to* MR JACKSON. *The* RECTOR *talks to* VIOLET *on sofa with* SIR JOHN. HENRY *comes down and sits by* STELLA.

HENRY. I hope you haven't been dull, Miss Faringford, while my mother has been out of the room. It's shocking of her to leave her guests in this way.

STELLA. Not at all. Vi has been playing to us. It has been delightful.

HENRY. You're very fond of music, aren't you?

STELLA. Yes. It's curious. When I was a child they made me learn of course, but I didn't care a bit about it. I was awfully troublesome over my lessons, I remember. So I made nothing of it. And now, when I'd give anything to be able to play, I can't.

HENRY. Why don't you take it up again?

STELLA. I do try sometimes. Sometimes I set to work and practise feverishly for a whole week. But it doesn't last.

HENRY. You should persevere.

STELLA. I know. But I don't. I suppose I'm lazy. But that's like me. I want to do things. I see I *ought* to do them. But somehow they don't get done. I expect you can't understand that?

HENRY. I'm afraid I can't. If I want a thing I take the necessary steps to get it. That's what 'wanting' means with me.

STELLA [*thoughtfully*]. And do you always get it?

HENRY. Generally. A man can generally get a thing in the end if he gives his mind to it.

STELLA. Most people wouldn't say that.

HENRY. That's because most people don't know what they want. Instead of fixing their mind on one thing, and being determined to get it, they keep aiming first at one thing and then at another. So of course they don't get anything. They don't deserve to.

STELLA. Most people don't *aim* at all. They simply take what comes.

HENRY. Surely *you* don't do that?

STELLA. I believe I do. [*Laughing*] You see there's really not room for more than one *will* in any family. In our family it's Mamma's. Mamma always knows what she wants—like you. The worst of it is she doesn't always know what *we* want.

HENRY. I see. What happens then?

STELLA. Oh, Mamma wins. We struggle a little sometimes, Papa and I. But she gets her way in the end. [*A pause*

HENRY. Miss Faringford, there's something I want to say to you.

STELLA. That sounds very serious.

HENRY. It is serious to me. It's something I've wanted to tell you for a long time.

STELLA [*rising nervously*]. Well, don't tell it me to-night. Later on, perhaps. I don't think I want to hear about serious things to-night.

[*Door opens—enter* MRS JACKSON, *and* MRS PRATT *a little later*

HENRY [*rising also*]. When may I tell it to you?

STELLA. I don't know. Some time, perhaps. But not now. Here's your mother come back with Mrs Pratt.

MRS JACKSON. Lady Faringford, what will you think of me for leaving you so long? But the housekeeper was out. She had gone down to the village to see her niece who is ill. So Mrs Pratt and I had to put the things together for Simmonds ourselves. Mrs Simmonds has another baby, Samuel.

MRS PRATT. The poor are terribly thoughtless in these matters. That makes her sixth. I'm bound to say poor Simmonds seemed quite conscious of his folly.

LADY FARINGFORD. That at least is satisfactory. But I have no hope that it will affect his future conduct. He will go on having children—at the usual intervals—until he dies. And then they will come on the Parish.

MRS JACKSON. But is Simmonds going to die? He said nothing about it. But of course he was rather flurried.

MR JACKSON. I hope you sent whatever was necessary, Maria?

MRS PRATT. Far more. I really had to interfere to prevent Mrs Jackson from emptying her store cupboard.

THE RECTOR. Well, well, I dare say poor Mrs Simmonds will find a use for everything.

MR JACKSON. No doubt. And besides, with an election in prospect——

SIR JOHN. Exactly. It can do no harm.

MR JACKSON. By the way, Sir John, as chairman of my election committee, there's a point on which I want your advice. The local branch of the Independent Order of Good Templars wrote to me ten days ago asking for a subscription. So I sent five guineas.

SIR JOHN. Quite right. The temperance vote must be reckoned with in this division.

MR JACKSON. Just so. But the Good Templars published the fact in the local newspaper.

SIR JOHN. Well, that's what you wanted, wasn't it?

MR JACKSON. Ye-es. No doubt. But I forgot that the Secretary of the local branch of the Licensed Victuallers Association would be sure to see the paragraph and write to me for an explanation.

SIR JOHN. I see. Did he?

MR JACKSON. Yes.

SIR JOHN. Ah! What did you do?

MR JACKSON. I was in some doubt. But Sims, my agent, told me the Licensed Victuallers had a benevolent fund or something. So I sent ten guineas to that. That seemed the best way out of the difficulty.

SIR JOHN. Much the best, much the best. [*Trying to escape.*

MR JACKSON [*detaining him*]. But that's not the end of the matter. For now the Good Templars have written to ask if I am prepared to support any legislation designed to combat the evil of the drink traffic. And the Licensed Victuallers want to know if I will pledge myself to oppose any Bill which aims at the reduction of the sale of intoxicating liquors.

SIR JOHN. Hum! They rather had you there!

MR JACKSON. Yes. . . . However, I think I've got out of it all right. I've written a letter to the Licensed Victuallers to say I'm not in favour of unduly restricting the sale of liquor in the interests of temperance propaganda. And I've written another to the Good Templars saying that I'm quite in favour of temperance propaganda, providing it doesn't unduly restrict the sale of intoxicating liquor. I think that meets the case?

SIR JOHN. I see. Running with the hare and hunting with the hounds in fact? Quite right. And now we really must be saying good-night. [*To* LADY FARINGFORD] Come, my dear. It's time we were going.

MRS JACKSON. Oh, you mustn't go yet. It's quite early.

LADY FARINGFORD. We are early people. [*Rises.*] We really must go. Stella, my dear, we must be putting on our things.

HENRY. I'll ask if your carriage is round. [*Rings.*

LADY FARINGFORD. If you will be so good. I told the coachman ten. I do hope it's stopped raining. I believe the farmers want it, but it's so bad for the horses. [*Enter* BAINES.

HENRY. Lady Faringford's carriage.

BAINES. It's at the door, sir.

HENRY. Very well.

LADY FARINGFORD. Good night, then, Mrs Jackson. Such a *pleasant* evening. Come, Stella.

[*General adieux. The* FARINGFORDS *and* STELLA *go out escorted by* HENRY *and* MR JACKSON.

MRS PRATT. I think *we* ought to be going too.

MRS JACKSON. No. No. You mustn't run away like that. I've not had a moment to speak to the Rector. And I'm sure Vi will want to talk to you about the next concert. Sit down again, Mrs Pratt. [*Re-enter* HENRY *and* MR JACKSON.] What sort of a night is it, Samuel? *Has* it stopped raining? [HENRY *goes to* VIOLET

MR JACKSON. Yes, it's not raining now. But it's very dark.

THE RECTOR. The moon's full, too. But I suppose there's too much cloud about.

MRS JACKSON. I do hope it will be lighter before you have to go home. It's such a dark road from here to the Rectory.

THE RECTOR. We have a lantern. We always bring it when we go out at night. We don't trust the moon. She's fickle, Mrs Jackson, like all her sex.

MRS JACKSON. Rector, if you talk like that I shall scold you. And so will Mrs Pratt.

[*Sudden noise of footsteps outside. Then door opens and enter* BAINES, *rather flurried.*

BAINES [*a little breathless*]. If you please, sir——

MR JACKSON. Well, what is it, Baines?

BAINES. If you please, sir, it's Mr Eustace. [MR JACKSON *turns sharp round.*] He was lying just by the front door.

MR JACKSON. Mr Eustace?

MRS JACKSON [*jumping up*]. Eustace!

BAINES. Yes, sir. Yes, madam. Thomas saw him just as he was coming in after shutting the front gate. The moon came out for a moment and he saw him. He's fainted, sir. At least I think so.

MRS JACKSON. I must go to him.

MR JACKSON. No. Not you, Maria. I'll go. [*The door opens.*

BAINES. I think they're bringing him in here, sir.

[*Enter the two* FOOTMEN, *carrying a draggled and dishevelled body by the shoulders and the heels.*

[*Pause.* VIOLET *moves the armchair to right, where it is taken*

*by* HENRY. *The* RECTOR *and* VIOLET *move the sofa to receive the body as the* FOOTMEN *bring it left.*

MRS JACKSON. Oh, my poor boy! My poor dear boy!

[*Rushes to him.*

VIOLET. Wait a minute. Put him here.

MRS JACKSON. Oh, he's dead! He's dead! I know he's dead.

VIOLET [*immediately*]. Hush, Mother. Some brandy, quick, Baines. And some cold water. I think he's only fainted.

[*Puts cushion under his head and opens shirt at neck.*

THE RECTOR. Poor fellow.

MRS PRATT. Oh, Mrs Jackson! Your sofa! It will be utterly ruined.

MRS JACKSON [*bending over him*]. Oh, I wish they'd be quick with the brandy. Henry, go at once for Doctor Glaisher.

THE RECTOR. Let *me* go. We pass his house anyway. And we mustn't stay any longer. We should only be in the way here. Come, my dear. [*Enter* BAINES *with brandy and jug of water.*

MRS PRATT. Good-bye, dear Mrs Jackson. No. You mustn't stir. And I do hope he'll be all right soon. We'll send Doctor Glaisher round at once.

THE RECTOR. Good-bye. [*To* HENRY] Don't come with me, my dear fellow. Baines can find my things. Stay and look after your brother. [*Exeunt* MR *and* MRS PRATT *and* BAINES.

[*Meantime* MRS JACKSON *has been trying to force some brandy between clenched teeth of the patient.*

VIOLET. Your handkerchief, Henry. Quick!

[HENRY *gives it. She dips it in jug, wrings it out, and puts it over patient's forehead by way of bandage.*

MRS JACKSON. He doesn't stir.

MR JACKSON. I can feel his heart beating a little, I think. But I'm not sure.

MRS JACKSON [*lamentably*]. Oh, will he *never* come round! I *wish* Doctor Glaisher would come. If he were to die!

VIOLET [*soothing her*]. Hush, Mother! He's only fainted. Didn't you hear Father say he could feel his heart beating?

MRS JACKSON. Isn't there anything else we could do? My salts!

VIOLET. I'll get them, Mother.

MRS JACKSON. They're on my dressing-table. [*Exit* VIOLET *hurriedly.*] No, I remember, I had them in the library this morning. I'll go and look. Or was it the breakfast-room? I'm not sure. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! Poor darling Eustace! [*Exit in burst of tears.*

MR JACKSON. She'll never find them. You go, Henry, and help her. Try the breakfast-room. [*Exeunt all save* MR JACKSON *and* EUSTACE.

[*After* MR JACKSON *has fidgeted round his son for a minute*

*or so in helpless and grotesque efforts to restore him to consciousness,* VIOLET'S *voice is heard through door which is left open.*

VIOLET [*without*]. Father!

MR JACKSON [*going to door, hurriedly*]. Yes, yes, what *is* it?

[*Enter* VIOLET.

VIOLET. Have you your keys? Mother thinks she may have left her salts on your desk in the library, and it's locked.

MR JACKSON. Tck! Here they are. [VIOLET *going.*] I'd better come, or you'll disturb all my papers. [*Exeunt* MR JACKSON *and* VIOLET.

[*The stage is left empty for a moment of all save the man on the sofa. Presently* EUSTACE *raises himself cautiously, looks round, then, finding no one there, takes off head bandage and wrings it out, listens again, then sits up and puts feet to ground, picks up a book with conspicuous red cover, on which he has been lying, glances at it, reads title "Hester's Escape," makes face, hears sound without, hurriedly puts feet up again on couch, replaces bandage, and lays his head back on pillow just as* MRS JACKSON *re-enters with* HENRY.

MRS JACKSON [*piteously*]. They're *not* in the library. Where *can* I have put them?

HENRY. The others will find them. Violet is looking in your bedroom. She always finds things. And the Governor is in the breakfast-room. They'll be here in a moment.

[*Enter* VIOLET *with salts in her hand, followed at a short interval by* MR JACKSON.

MRS JACKSON. Thanks, dear. [*Holds the salts tremulously to patient's nose, but forgetting to take out stopper, kneeling by his side.*] Where were they?

VIOLET. In the dining-room, on the writing-table.

MRS JACKSON. Oh, yes, I remember. I had them there at lunch-time. I *knew* I had put them somewhere.

HENRY [*irritably*]. My dear mother, there's no use holding those salts to his nose unless you take the stopper out.

[MRS JACKSON *fumbles with stopper. Patient stirs slightly and turns away his head.*

MR JACKSON. He's coming round. He moved a little. Try him with some more brandy.

[MRS JACKSON *puts down salts and takes up brandy, which she pours into patient's mouth. He makes elaborate business of coming round, gives a sigh, opens his eyes, then raises himself and looks round.*

EUSTACE. Is that you, Mother?

MRS JACKSON. Yes, dear, yes.

EUSTACE. Where am I?

MRS JACKSON. At home, dear. Your own home. Oh, he's not dead! He's not dead! [*Embraces him, sobbing passionately.*

## ACT II

SCENE: *The breakfast-room at the* JACKSONS'. *In the middle of stage the breakfast-table which is round and would hold about six people. It is fully laid with cloth, tea and coffee things, toast dishes, etc. The fireplace (no fire) is on the right, and above and below it are leather-covered armchairs. There is a large French window at back through which is seen garden. The windows are open as it is a bright summer day. There is a door right leading up to hall. On the left is a side-board on which stand fruit, some spare plates, etc., also a box of cigars and a box of cigarettes. On either side of the window are bookcases. Down left, below sideboard, a writing-table. When the curtain rises* MR JACKSON *sits right of table.* HENRY *on left,* VIOLET *on the side furthest from footlights. She has the coffee, etc., in front of her.* MR JACKSON *is faced by bacon dishes. They all go on eating their breakfasts for half a minute after curtain has risen.* HENRY *is reading a newspaper propped up by his side.* VIOLET *is reading letters.*

HENRY [*handing cup*]. More coffee, please, Violet. [*To* MR JACKSON] Wenhams have failed, Father.

MR JACKSON. It's only what we expected, isn't it?

HENRY. Yes. Forty thousand they say here. But of course it's only a guess. No one can know till the accounts are made up.

MR JACKSON. They've been shaky for some time. [*Enter* MRS JACKSON.] Well, how is he?

MRS JACKSON. Much better. He looks quite a different person.

MR JACKSON. Did he eat any breakfast?

MRS JACKSON. He hasn't had any yet. At least, only a cup of tea. He says he'd rather come down. He's getting up now.

VIOLET. Didn't Doctor Glaisher say he was to stay in bed?

MRS JACKSON. Yes. But if he wants to come down I don't think it can do any harm. He can lie down on the sofa till lunch if he feels tired.

MR JACKSON. What time is Glaisher coming?

VIOLET. Half-past ten, he said.

HENRY. Has Eustace explained how he came to be lying in the drive in that state? Last night we could get nothing out of him.

MRS JACKSON. No wonder. He was dazed, poor boy. He had walked all the way from London and had had nothing to eat.

HENRY. How was it he was in London? He was sent to Australia.

MRS JACKSON. He *had* been in Australia. He worked his passage home.

MR JACKSON. His money is all gone, I suppose—the thousand pounds I gave him?

MRS JACKSON. I don't know, Samuel. I didn't ask.

MR JACKSON. Humph! . . . [*Pause.*] I'll trouble you for the toast, please, Henry.

HENRY. I suppose we'd better make inquiries about Wenhams, Father. It might be worth our while to buy the mill if it goes cheap. Then we could run it and ours together.

MR JACKSON. Just so. Will you see to that? [HENRY *nods.*

MRS JACKSON. I've got a letter to Aunt Isabel to send by the early post. I ought to have written it last night. Will you put it into the box for me, Samuel, as you go to the mill?

[*Goes to writing-table and sits.*

MR JACKSON. Certainly, my dear.

HENRY. Very tiresome Eustace turning up in that disreputable condition last night. What will Stella think?

MR JACKSON. It's lucky the Faringfords had gone before he was brought in.

HENRY. The Pratts hadn't. Mrs Pratt will have told the entire village before lunch-time.

VIOLET. I don't see why we should mind if she does. There's nothing to be ashamed of. [*Rises and reads letter by fireplace.*

HENRY [*impatiently*]. Well, we won't discuss it.

MRS JACKSON. By the way, Henry, did you say anything to Stella last night?

HENRY [*hesitates*]. No.

MR JACKSON. I thought you were going to.

HENRY. I was. In fact, I did begin. But she didn't let me finish. I suppose she didn't understand what I was going to say.

MR JACKSON. Don't put it off too long. There may be an election any day now, and the Faringford influence means a great deal.

HENRY. You've got Faringford's influence already. He's chairman of your committee.

MR JACKSON. That's true. Still, he'll take more trouble when I'm one of the family, so to speak. Yes, I shouldn't put it off if I were you.

HENRY. Very well, Father.

MR JACKSON. Of course Faringford is as poor as Job. The estate's mortgaged up to the hilt. And anything there is after he and Lady Faringford go out of the coach—if there is anything—will go to the

son. Stella won't have a sixpence. Still they're good people, position in the County and all that. And *you'll* have enough money for both.

HENRY. Yes. Especially if we get hold of Wenhams' mill. I'm sure I could make a good thing out of it. We'd put in turbines as we did here, get new machinery, and double our output.

MR JACKSON. How are the turbines working, by the way?

HENRY. All right. And they'll go still better when the new sluices are done. Well, I shall go over to the mill now. Are you coming?

MR JACKSON. In a moment. [*Finishes his coffee and rises.*

[*Exit* HENRY.

VIOLET. Shall I get your hat and stick, Father?

MR JACKSON. Do, dear. [*Exit* VIOLET.] Is your letter ready, Maria?

MRS JACKSON. Just done. [*Fastens it up, rising*] You won't forget it, will you? [*Re-enter* HENRY *with hat.*

MR JACKSON. No. Or if I do Henry will remind me.

MRS JACKSON [*to* HENRY]. Won't you wait and see Eustace before you go, Henry? He'll be down in a moment.

HENRY. It doesn't matter. I shall see him soon enough. Coming, Father? [*Exit centre.*

MRS JACKSON. I think Henry might have stayed to see Eustace before he started.

MR JACKSON. I dare say he'll be over in the course of the morning.

[VIOLET *re-entering.*

VIOLET. Here's your hat and stick, Father.

MR JACKSON. That's a good girl. [*Kisses her.*] Good-bye. I shall be in for lunch. [*Exit centre.*

MRS JACKSON [*going to bacon dish and lifting cover*]. We must order some more bacon. Or do you think Eustace had better have an egg?

VIOLET. Shall I go up and ask him?

MRS JACKSON. Do, dear. And I wonder if you'd see cook at the same time and ask her if she's wanting anything. I have to go into the village.

VIOLET. Very well, Mother.

[*Exit* VIOLET. MRS JACKSON *takes away plates to sideboard, clears a place for* EUSTACE *where* HENRY *sat, and lays for him.*

BAINES [*announcing*]. Doctor Glaisher. [*Enter* DR GLAISHER *right.*

MRS JACKSON [*shaking hands*]. Oh, doctor! Good morning. [*To* BAINES] Tell Mr Eustace Doctor Glaisher is here. [*Exit* BAINES.

DR GLAISHER [*brisk and professional*]. Well, how does he seem? Going on well?

MRS JACKSON. Quite well, I think.

DR GLAISHER. Did he have a good night?

MRS JACKSON. Excellent, he says.

DR GLAISHER. Ah! Just so. Shall I go up to him?

MRS JACKSON. He's coming down for breakfast. He'll be here in a moment.

DR GLAISHER. Coming down, is he? [*By fireplace*] Come, that looks satisfactory. Still, we must be careful. No overfatigue. His condition last night gave cause for considerable anxiety. Indeed, I may say that if I had not fortunately been sent for at once and applied the necessary remedies there was distinct danger of collapse, um! distinct danger.

MRS JACKSON. Oh, doctor!

[*Enter* EUSTACE *very fresh and genial in an admirable suit of clothes.*

DR GLAISHER. Ah, here he is!

EUSTACE. Good morning, Mother. [*Kisses her.*] Hullo, doctor. Come to see me?

DR GLAISHER [*shaking hands*]. Well, and how are we this morning?

EUSTACE. Getting on all right, I think. A bit limp and washed out, perhaps.

DR GLAISHER. Just so. The temperature normal? No fever? [*Touches forehead.*] That's right. Pulse? [*Feels it.*] A little irregular, perhaps. But nothing serious. Excitement due to overfatigue, no doubt. Now, let me see your tongue. Just so. As I should have expected. Just as I should have expected, dear Mrs Jackson. Appetite not very good, I suppose?

EUSTACE. Er—not very.

DR GLAISHER. Just so. Just so. [*Nods sagaciously.*

EUSTACE [*gaily*]. Not dead yet, eh, doctor? [*Sits on arm of chair.*

MRS JACKSON. My dear!

DR GLAISHER [*with heavy geniality*]. We shall pull you through. Oh, we shall pull you through. But you must take care of yourself for a few days. No excitement! No overfatigue. The system wants *tone* a little, wants *tone*.

EUSTACE. I see. I'm to take it easy, in fact, for a bit, eh?

DR GLAISHER. Just so.

EUSTACE. I won't forget. I say, what clever beggars you doctors are! You feel a fellow's pulse and look at his tongue and you know *all* about him at once. Don't you?

DR GLAISHER [*pleased*]. Not *all*, perhaps. But there are indications, symptoms, which the professional man can interpret. . . .

EUSTACE [*interrupting*]. Quite extraordinary. I say, what do you think of these clothes? Not *bad*, are they? They're Henry's. But *I* chose them—out of his drawers. Poor old Henry!

MRS JACKSON. How naughty of you, Eustace! I'm sure Henry won't like it.

EUSTACE. Of course he won't, Mother dear. Nobody does like his clothes being worn by some one else. But I must wear something, you know. I can't come down to breakfast in a suit of pyjamas. Besides, they're Henry's pyjamas.

MRS JACKSON. But I told Thomas specially to put out an old suit of your father's for you. Didn't he do it?

EUSTACE. Yes. But I can't wear the Governor's clothes, you know. We haven't the same figure. I say I'd better ring for breakfast.

[*Does so.*

MRS JACKSON. Have you ordered it, dear? I sent Vi up to ask whether you'd like bacon or eggs.

EUSTACE. Yes. Violet asked me. I said bacon *and* eggs. [*Enter* VIOLET.] Hullo, Vi, you're just in time to pour out my coffee.

DR GLAISHER [*shakes hands with* VIOLET]. Well, I must be off to my other patients. [*To* MRS JACKSON] Good-bye, Mrs Jackson. He is going on well, quite as well as can be expected, that is. There are no fresh symptoms of an unfavourable character. But you must keep him quiet for a few days. There are signs of nervousness about him, a sort of suppressed excitement which I don't like. The system wants *tone*, decidedly wants tone. I'll send him up a mixture to take. He has evidently been through some strain lately. I knew that directly I saw him last night. You can't deceive a doctor!

[MAN *brings in breakfast—rack of toast on table, coffee and rolls on sideboard, clears table of dirty plates, etc., so as to leave only a manageable quantity of 'business' for* BAINES *when latter has to clear the table later.*

MRS JACKSON [*anxiously*]. But you don't think there's anything *serious* the matter?

DR GLAISHER. No! no! Let us hope not. The general constitution is sound enough, not overstrong perhaps, but sound. And with youth on his side. Let me see, how old is he?

MRS JACKSON. Nine-and-twenty.

DR GLAISHER. Just so. Just so. Well, good morning. [*To* EUSTACE] Good morning. And remember, quiet, perfectly quiet. I'll look in again to-morrow morning and see how he's getting on.

EUSTACE [*nods*]. Good-bye! [*Goes towards breakfast-table.*

[DR GLAISHER *shakes hands with* VIOLET *and goes out right.* VIOLET *seats herself at table to pour out* EUSTACE'S *coffee.* MRS JACKSON *sits by* EUSTACE.

Mother, I think *I* must become a doctor. It's the only profession I know of which seems to require no knowledge whatever, and it's the sort of thing I should do rather well. [*Begins his breakfast.*

[*Exit* FOOTMAN.

MRS JACKSON. I dare say, my dear. You must speak to your father

about it. . . . [*Sitting*] And now you must tell us *all* about yourself. What have you been doing all this time? And why have you never written?

EUSTACE. There was nothing to tell you—that you'd have liked to hear.

MRS JACKSON. My dear, of course we should have liked to hear everything about you.

EUSTACE. I doubt it. No news is good news. I bet the Governor thought that—and Henry.

MRS JACKSON. No, no, dear. I assure you your father was quite anxious when we never heard—at first.

EUSTACE. Ah, well, if the Governor was so anxious to know how I was he shouldn't have packed me off to Australia. I never could endure writing letters.

VIOLET. Still, you might have sent us word. It would have been kinder to Mother. [*Down to fire and sits front of table.*

EUSTACE [*laying his hand on his mother's as it lies on the arm of her chair*]. Poor Mother. I suppose I was a brute. But I've not been very prosperous these five years, and as I'd nothing pleasant to say I thought I wouldn't write.

MRS JACKSON. But what became of your money, dear? The thousand pounds your father gave you?

EUSTACE. I lost it.

MRS JACKSON. Lost it?

EUSTACE. Part of it went in a sheep-farm. I suppose I was a bad farmer. Anyhow, the sheep died. The other part I put in a gold-mine. I suppose I wasn't much of a miner. Anyhow, there was no gold in it. I was in the Mounted Police for a time. That was in Natal. It wasn't bad, but it didn't lead to anything. So I cleared out. I've been in a bank in Hong-Kong. I've driven a cable-car in San Francisco, I've been a steward on a liner, I've been an actor, and I've been a journalist. I've tried my hand at most things, in fact. At one time I played in an orchestra.

MRS JACKSON. You were always so fond of music.

EUSTACE [*drily*]. Yes, I played the triangle—and took a whack at the big drum between times.

VIOLET. How absurd you are!

EUSTACE. Finally, I came home. That was when my experience as a steward came in. I worked my passage as one—if you can call it work! I was sick all the time.

MRS JACKSON. How dreadful!

EUSTACE. It was—for the passengers.

VIOLET. How long ago was that?

EUSTACE. Only about a month. Since then I've been in London

picking up a living one way or another. At last, when I found myself at the end of my tether, I started to walk here. And here I am.

Mrs Jackson. My dear boy! You must have found it terribly muddy!

Eustace. I did. But life always is rather muddy, isn't it? At least, that's my experience.

Mrs Jackson. But weren't you *very* tired?

Eustace. I was tired, of course. Give me some more coffee, Vi. [*She does so.*] Well, how have you all been at home? How's the Governor?

Mrs Jackson. He's been very well on the whole. His lumbago was rather troublesome at the end of last year. Otherwise he's been all right.

Eustace. Does he stick to business as close as ever?

Mrs Jackson. Not quite. You see, Henry's a partner now. The firm is Jackson, Hartopp, and Jackson, and *he* takes a good deal of work off your father's shoulders. Henry is an excellent man of business. [Eustace *nods.*] Your father gives more of his time to public affairs now. He's a magistrate and been on the County Council for the last three years. And now he's standing for Parliament.

Eustace. The family's looking up in the world. The business is flourishing, then?

Mrs Jackson. Oh, yes. They've put in all new machinery in the last three years. And they've got turbines instead of the old water-wheels. That was Henry's idea. And now they can turn out a cheaper cloth than any of the mills round here.

Eustace. Cheaper? The Governor used to despise cheap cloth.

Mrs Jackson. Yes, but Henry said it was no use making cloth that would last a lifetime if people only wanted it to last twelve months. So he got over new machines—from America. And now they don't make any *good* cloth at all, and your father has trebled his income.

Eustace. Bravo, Henry.

Mrs Jackson [*rises*]. And now I really must go down to the village and do my shopping. Have you got cook's list, Vi?

Violet. Yes, Mother. But I'm coming too. I promised Mrs Pratt I'd call at the Vicarage before twelve to arrange about the next mothers' meeting.

Mrs Jackson [*to* Eustace]. You'll find the paper there, dear, and some cigarettes, unless you think you oughtn't to smoke. I'll ring for them to clear away. And remember, dear, Doctor Glaisher said you were to keep *quite* quiet. [*Kisses him.*

Eustace. All right, Mother. I'll remember.

[Mrs Jackson *and* Violet *go out.* Eustace *shuts the door, comes slowly down stage. The smile dies out of his face, and he gives a perceptible yawn. Then he goes right,*

*chooses cigarette, lights it in leisurely fashion. Takes up paper. Comes to left. Selects chair above fireplace, sits down, and begins to read.*

[*Enter* BAINES.

You can clear away, Baines.

BAINES. Thank you, sir. [*Pause, clearing away.*] I hope you're feeling better this morning, sir?

[*Goes on clearing table throughout this scene.*

EUSTACE. Thanks, Baines, the doctor thinks I'm getting on all right.

BAINES. Narrow escape you had last night, sir. Thomas says the carriage wheels must have gone within a foot of your head.

EUSTACE. Thomas is a—I mean, does he say that?

BAINES. Curious thing we shouldn't have seen you, sir. We must have been that close. But it was a very dark night except when the moon was out. Then it was as bright as day almost. That was how he came to see you, sir.

EUSTACE. Oh, that was it, was it?

BAINES. Yes, sir. You see Thomas had just shut the gate after the carriage drove away and the moon happened to come out . . .

EUSTACE [*bored*]. Quite so. Whose carriage was it, by the way?

BAINES. Sir John Faringford's, sir.

EUSTACE. Well, if one's head is to be driven over it may as well be by a member of the aristocracy, eh, Baines?

BAINES. Certainly, sir.

EUSTACE. Sir John often dines here nowadays?

BAINES. Yes, sir. And Lady Faringford, and Miss Stella.

EUSTACE. Miss Stella?

BAINES. Their daughter, sir. I dare say you wouldn't remember her. Only came out about a year ago. [*Pause.*

EUSTACE. So my father is standing for Parliament, is he?

BAINES. Yes, sir.

EUSTACE. Will he get in?

BAINES. It's thought so, sir.

EUSTACE. By the way which side is he on?

BAINES [*puzzled*]. I beg pardon, sir?

EUSTACE. Which side? Liberal or Conservative?

BAINES. Conservative *of course*, sir. All the people round here are Conservative. All the gentry, that is.

EUSTACE. More respectable, eh, Baines?

BAINES. Yes, sir. [BAINES, *who has tray in his hand, hears bell, has a moment of indecision, then puts tray down on table.*] Excuse me, sir.

[*Exit.*

[EUSTACE *goes back to his paper. A moment later* BAINES *returns and looks about on writing-table.*

EUSTACE. What is it, Baines? Do you want anything.

BAINES. If you please, sir, Miss Faringford has called for a book Miss Violet promised to lend her. [*Continues to search.*

EUSTACE [*after pause*]. Have you found it?

BAINES. No, sir.

EUSTACE [*putting down paper on other armchair, bored and rising*]. I'd better see her.

[*Goes out right.* BAINES *folds tablecloth and puts it away in sideboard drawer. Is just about to go out carrying tray when enter* STELLA *followed by* EUSTACE. *Draws back to let them pass as they enter.*

Come in, Miss Faringford. Perhaps I can find the book for you. What was it like?

STELLA. It was just an ordinary-looking novel. With a bright red cover. Called *Hester's Escape.*

EUSTACE. *Hester's Escape.* I seem to remember the name. [*Turns round and faces her for the first time. Pause. Is obviously struck by the fact that she is a very pretty girl.*] But Vi will know where it is. You'd better wait till she comes in. Sit down. She'll be back directly.

STELLA [*sitting in armchair by the fireplace*]. Are you sure?

EUSTACE. Quite!

[*Turns round chair at breakfast-table in front of fireplace and sits in it.*

[*Exit* BAINES.

You won't mind an untidy room, will you? I'm afraid I breakfasted late.

STELLA. I wonder you are down at all.

EUSTACE. Oh, I'm all right.

STELLA. Are you sure you ought to talk? People who have been ill ought to be quiet, oughtn't they?

EUSTACE. There's really nothing the matter with me.

STELLA. That's not what Mrs Pratt told me. I met her in the village as I was coming here.

EUSTACE. Ah, yes. She was present of course when I made my dramatic entry. Did she tell you about it? I hope it went off well.

STELLA. You frightened every one terribly, if that's what you mean. Mrs Pratt says you looked dreadful. She thought you were going to die.

EUSTACE. Quite a thrilling experience for her. She ought to be very much obliged to me.

STELLA. How can you joke about it! You might really have died, you know. But when people have travelled all over the world as you have, and endured hardship and danger, I suppose death doesn't seem so terrible to them as it does to us who stay at home.

EUSTACE. I suppose not. They get used to it.

STELLA. Have you often been in great danger, really great, I mean?

EUSTACE. I was at Singapore when the plague was there.

STELLA. How awful!

EUSTACE. Yes. It wasn't pleasant.

STELLA. I can't think how anyone can stay in England when he might go out and see the world. If I were a man I would go abroad and visit strange countries and have wonderful adventures as you have done, not waste my life in a dull little village like Chedleigh.

EUSTACE. My dear Miss Faringford, the whole world is a dull little village like Chedleigh, and I've wasted my life in it. [*Enter* BAINES.

BAINES. If you please, sir, the Rector has called to ask how you are.

EUSTACE. Oh, bother! Say I'm very much obliged and I'm all right.

BAINES. He said he would like to see you if you felt well enough, sir.

EUSTACE. Ah! wait a minute. [*Thinks.*] Will you say I'm not well at all and quite unfit to see him this morning.

BAINES. Very well, sir. [*Exit.*

STELLA [*rising*]. And now I must go. I'm only tiring you. I expect you oughtn't to talk.

EUSTACE. But I assure you . . .

STELLA. And as you're quite unfit to see visitors——

EUSTACE. I'm quite unfit to see the Rector. That's quite a different thing. I'm perfectly up to seeing you. Besides, Violet should be here directly, now. Sit down again.

STELLA [*hesitating*]. I don't think I *ought* to stay.

EUSTACE. I'm sure you ought. One should visit the sick, you know.

STELLA [*with a laugh*]. You don't seem quite able to make up your mind whether you are ill or well.

EUSTACE. No. I vary. I find it more convenient. [*Enter* BAINES.] [*Irritably*] Well, what is it *now*, Baines?

BAINES. Lady Faringford. [*Enter* LADY FARINGFORD. EUSTACE *rises.*

STELLA [*rising*]. Mamma!

LADY FARINGFORD [*ignoring her*]. Mr Eustace Jackson, is it not? How do you do? [*Shakes hands frigidly.*] I heard in the village of your sudden return, and stopped the carriage to ask how you were. As the servant told me you were downstairs I thought I would come in for a moment.

EUSTACE. Very kind of you, Lady Faringford.

LADY FARINGFORD [*severely*]. You hardly appear as ill as I expected.

EUSTACE. I hope the disappointment is an agreeable one?

LADY FARINGFORD. *No* disappointments are agreeable, sir. And pray what are *you* doing here, Stella?

EUSTACE. Miss Faringford called for a book my sister lent her last

night, *Hester's Escape*. I persuaded her to come in and sit down till Violet returned.

LADY FARINGFORD. You are expecting her soon?

EUSTACE. Every moment.

LADY FARINGFORD. Ah! Then I don't think we can wait.

EUSTACE. But Miss Faringford's book. She mustn't go away without it. Sit down for a moment while I see if I can find it. [*To* STELLA] A bright red cover, I think you said. [*Looks round the room for it.*

LADY FARINGFORD [*icily*]. Pray don't trouble, Mr Jackson.

EUSTACE. *Hester's Escape*? I'm sure I've seen it somewhere. [*Thinks a moment.*] I know. It was in the drawing-room last night. Excuse me for a moment. I'll go and get it. [*Exit.*

LADY FARINGFORD [*sitting down, sternly*]. Really, Stella, I'm surprised at you.

STELLA. What is it, Mamma?

LADY FARINGFORD. You know, perfectly well. How long have you been here?

STELLA [*sulkily*]. I don't know. . . . About ten minutes, perhaps.

LADY FARINGFORD. Do you make a habit of paying morning calls upon young men without a chaperon?

STELLA. No, Mamma.

LADY FARINGFORD. Then I hope you will not begin to do so.

STELLA. I came to call for a book which Vi promised to lend me. Vi was out and Mr Jackson very kindly asked me to come in and wait. What harm is there in that?

LADY FARINGFORD. There is every harm. Understand, please, that Mr Eustace Jackson is not a suitable acquaintance for you.

STELLA. He is Henry's brother. You have no objection to my knowing Henry.

LADY FARINGFORD. That is quite different. Henry has a large income and excellent prospects. He is a man whom any young girl may be allowed to know. Eustace is a mere ne'er-do-well.

STELLA. Am I never to speak to anyone who isn't rich? The Du Cranes aren't rich or the Vere-Anstruthers. Yet we know them. We aren't rich ourselves if it comes to that.

LADY FARINGFORD. That has nothing to do with it. The Du Cranes and poor George Anstruther are gentlepeople. The Jacksons are tradesmen.

STELLA. I think people make far too much fuss about being 'gentlepeople.'

LADY FARINGFORD. Then I hope you won't say so. I don't like this pernicious modern jargon about shopkeepers and gentlefolk being much the same. There's far too much truth in it to be agreeable.

STELLA. If it's true why shouldn't we say it?

LADY FARINGFORD. Because we have everything to lose by doing so. We were born into this world with what is called position. Owing to that position we are received everywhere, flattered, made much of. Though we are poor, rich people are eager to invite us to their houses and marry our daughters. So much the better for us. But if we began telling people that position was all moonshine, family an antiquated superstition, and many duchesses far less like ladies than their maids, the world would ultimately discover that what we were saying was perfectly true. Whereupon we should lose the very comfortable niche in the social system which we at present enjoy and—who knows? —might actually be reduced in the end to doing something useful for our living like other people. No, no, my dear, rank and birth and the peerage may be all nonsense, but it isn't *our* business to say so. Leave that to vulgar people who have something to gain by it. *Noblesse oblige!* [*Enter* EUSTACE *with the book in his hand.*

EUSTACE. Here is the book, Miss Faringford. I hope you haven't had to wait too long. It was in the drawing-room, as I thought, but it had got put away under some papers.

STELLA. Thank you so much.

LADY FARINGFORD [*rising, icily*]. Good-bye, Mr Jackson.

STELLA. Good-bye. Give my love to Violet. [*Shakes hands.*

[*Exeunt* LADY FARINGFORD *and* STELLA *escorted by* EUSTACE *right. After a moment enter* HENRY *by window centre. He has some papers with him which he has brought from the mill. He takes off hat, puts papers on table up, is about to write letter, when re-enter* EUSTACE.

EUSTACE [*after moment strolls across to* HENRY]. Hullo, Henry. Where did you spring from? [*They shake hands.*

HENRY. From the mill. I came across the lawn. We had a short cut made through the shrubbery and a gate put three years ago. It's quicker.

EUSTACE. One of *your* improvements, eh?

HENRY. Yes. [EUSTACE *laughs.*] You're amused?

EUSTACE. It's so like you having a path made so as to get to your work quicker.

HENRY. Yes. I'm not an idler.

EUSTACE. Quite so. And *I* am, you mean? [EUSTACE *sits.*

HENRY [*shrugs*]. I didn't say so.

EUSTACE. You wanted to spare my feelings, no doubt. Very thoughtful of you. [*A pause.*

HENRY. Is your mother in?

EUSTACE. I believe not. . . . By the way, I've been borrowing some of your clothes. Not a bad fit, are they? It's lucky we're so much the same size.

HENRY [*grimly*]. Very!

EUSTACE. It's particularly lucky, as I've been entertaining visitors on behalf of the family.

HENRY. Indeed?

EUSTACE. Yes. One of them a very charming visitor.

HENRY. Who was that?

EUSTACE. Miss Faringford.

HENRY. Stella?

EUSTACE. Yes. Very nice girl altogether. She was here quite a long time while I told her my adventures—or as much of them as I thought suitable. Then unhappily her mother turned up. Rather an awful woman that.

HENRY. What did Stella come for?

EUSTACE. Not to inquire after me, if that's what you mean. Miss Faringford came for a book Vi had lent her, *Hester's Escape*. She's certainly a very pretty girl. And a nice one.

HENRY [*stiffly*]. I may as well tell you I intend to marry Stella Faringford.

EUSTACE. Indeed. [*Pause.*] Have you asked her yet?

HENRY. No.

EUSTACE. Then I wouldn't be too sure if I were you. Perhaps she won't have you.

HENRY [*rising after silence*]. Oh, by the way, how are you?

EUSTACE. I'm all right, thanks.

HENRY [*irritably*]. How on earth did you come to be lying in the drive in that way last night?

EUSTACE [*airily*]. Exhaustion, my dear chap. Cold and exposure! Hunger. You know the kind of thing.

HENRY. Cold? Why, it's the height of summer!

EUSTACE. Heat, then.

HENRY. But how did you manage to *get* here. That's what *I* want to know. You were supposed to be in Australia.

EUSTACE [*beginning to laugh*]. I'll tell you. [*Sits on table.*] Only you must promise not to give me away. [HENRY *turns.*] I was awfully hard up and awfully sick of finding jobs and losing them, and at last I began to long for a proper dinner, properly served, and a decent suit of clothes. Like these. I thought of writing to the Governor. But that would have been no good. He'd have sent me some good advice and the Mater would have sent a fiver and in a fortnight things would have been as bad as ever. At last I thought of a dramatic *coup*. The Prodigal's Return! The Fatted Calf. A father softened, a mother in tears. The virtuous elder brother scowling in the background. So I came here. Back to the Old Home, you know. At the front door I selected a convenient spot and lay down in an elaborate faint. Excuse

the pun. I chose the moment just after the Faringford's carriage had gone. I knew the footman would have to come in after shutting the gate and I intended to kick his leg and groan in an impressive manner. Anything to attract attention. Fortunately the moon came out just at the right moment, so the fool couldn't help spotting me. He called Baines who recognized me in a moment. They were very sympathetic! I expect they thought I was drunk. The lower classes are always sympathetic to intoxication. I was borne into the drawing-room. The wandering sheep returned to the fold, the exile home again. *Tableau!* most pathetic!

HENRY [*disgusted*]. And so you *walked* all the way from London to Chedleigh in order to play off a heartless practical joke.

EUSTACE. Walked? Nonsense. I came by train.

HENRY. But you told Vi you walked.

EUSTACE. I said I *started* to walk. I only got as far as the station.

HENRY [*angrily*]. It was unpardonable. The Mater was awfully upset. So was the Governor.

EUSTACE. That was the idea. There's nothing like a sudden shock to bring out anyone's real feelings. The Governor had no idea how fond he was of me until he saw me apparently dead and unlikely to give him further trouble. And by the time I came round he'd forgotten the cause of his sudden affection—or perhaps he's never realized it—and was genuinely glad to see me. Psychologically it was most interesting. [EUSTACE *goes up to window.*

HENRY. It was extremely undignified and quite unnecessary. If you had simply come up to the front door and rung the bell you would have been received just as readily.

EUSTACE. I doubt it. [HENRY *moves to left.*] In fact, I doubt if I should have been received at all. I might possibly have been given a bed for the night, but only on the distinct understanding that I left early the next morning. Whereas now nobody talks of my going. A poor invalid. In the doctor's hands! Perfect quiet essential! No. My plan was best.

[HENRY *moves up to* EUSTACE *and past him down to fire.*

HENRY. Why didn't that fool Glaisher see through you?

EUSTACE. Doctors never see through their patients. It's not what they're paid for, and it's contrary to professional etiquette. [HENRY *makes exclamation of disgust.*] Besides, Glaisher's an ass, I'm glad to say.

HENRY [*fuming*]. It would serve you right if I told the Governor the whole story.

EUSTACE. I dare say. But you won't. It wouldn't be cricket. Besides, I only told you on condition you kept it to yourself.

HENRY [*exasperated*]. So I'm to be made a partner in your fraud. The thing's a swindle, and I've got to take a share in it.

EUSTACE. Swindle? Not a bit. [*Sits.*] You've lent a hand, without intending it, to reuniting a happy family circle. Smoothed the way for the Prodigal's return. A very beautiful trait in your character.

HENRY [*grumpy*]. What I don't understand is *why* you told me all this. Why in heaven's name didn't you keep the whole discreditable story to yourself?

EUSTACE. The fact is I was pretty sure you'd find me out. The Governor's a perfect owl, but you've got brains—of a kind. You can see a thing when it's straight before your nose. So I thought I'd let you into the secret from the start, just to keep your mouth shut.

HENRY [*exclamation of impatience*]. And what are you going to do now you *are* at home?

EUSTACE. Do, my dear chap? Why, nothing.

## ACT III

SCENE: *The lawn at Chedleigh Court. Ten days have passed since Act II. It is a Saturday, and the time is after luncheon. The house itself, with its French windows on to the lawn, is on the right of stage. The back represents the garden with paddock beyond bounded by stream on which stands the mill, a picturesque old Tudor structure of grey stone. The garden is also supposed to stretch away to the left, and there is a path up left leading off to mill. The other entrance is through the French windows right from house. When the curtain rises* EUSTACE *is discovered in new grey flannel suit in a hammock towards the left, swinging indolently. There is a wicker table about centre, and three or four wicker garden-chairs with bright red cushions. In one of these* HENRY *is seated, reading a newspaper.* EUSTACE *has cup of coffee in his hand.* HENRY *has one on table beside him. Presently* EUSTACE *drinks some, looking with indolent amusement at his brother absorbed in his newspaper.*

EUSTACE. Not bad coffee, this.

[*Finishes it and begins to perform acrobatic feat of putting cup and saucer on ground without breaking them.*

HENRY [*looking up*]. I dare say. [*Takes some.*] You'll drop that cup.

EUSTACE. I think not. [*Puts it successfully on ground.*

HENRY. If you leave it there some one's sure to put his foot in it.

EUSTACE. I'll risk it.

HENRY. *Bah!* [*Rises and puts* EUSTACE's *cup on table.*

EUSTACE. Thanks, old man. Perhaps it *is* safer there. [HENRY

*grunts again and returns to his newspaper.* EUSTACE *gets cigarette out of pocket and lights it indolently.*] Anything exciting in the paper? Any convulsions in Wool?

HENRY. No.

EUSTACE. Where's the Governor? He generally comes home to luncheon on Saturdays, doesn't he?

HENRY. He's lunching at the Wilmingtons' with the Mater. He'll be back soon. There's a meeting of his Election Committee at four.

EUSTACE. Where?

HENRY. Here.

EUSTACE. Will he get in?

HENRY. Faringford thinks so. But it'll be a close thing. A very little might turn the scale either way.

EUSTACE. Cost him a good deal, I suppose?

HENRY. Pretty well.

EUSTACE. *Panem et circenses*, bread and circuses. That's the Tory prescription, isn't it? Particularly circuses.

HENRY. I dare say.

SERVANT [*ushering* DR GLAISHER *from French windows*]. Doctor Glaisher to see you, sir. [*Removes cups and exit.*

EUSTACE. How do you do, doctor. [*Shaking hands*] I'm following your prescription, you see. Rest! Rest! There's nothing like it.

DR GLAISHER. Just so. I really came for your father's committee. I thought it was to be at three o'clock. But your man tells me it's not till four. So I thought I'd like to look at my patient. Well, and how are we to-day?

[HENRY *watches this scene with mingled rage and disgust, to* EUSTACE'S *huge delight.*

EUSTACE. Going on all right, thanks. Still a little limp perhaps.

DR GLAISHER. Just so. The temperature normal? No fever? That's right. [*Feels pulse.*] Pulse? [*Pause.*] Quite regular. Now the tongue. Just so. [*To* HENRY] As I should have expected. Just as I should have expected. Appetite still good?

EUSTACE. Excellent, thanks.

DR GLAISHER. You're still taking your glass of port at eleven? Just so, oh, you'll soon be all right.

EUSTACE. Thanks to *you*, doctor.

DR GLAISHER. Not at all. *Not* at all. [*To* HENRY] He'll soon be himself again now. System still wants tone a little, wants tone. I'll send him round some more of that mixture. Otherwise he's all right.

[HENRY *grunts.*

EUSTACE. And you'll look in again in a day or two [HENRY *rises and goes up*] just to see how I am, won't you, doctor?

DR GLAISHER. Certainly, if you wish it. And now I must be off.

I have a couple of patients near here whom I could see in the next half-hour and be back again by four. Good-bye. Good-bye. Don't disturb yourself, pray. [*Fusses off right.*

HENRY [*savagely*]. Ass!

EUSTACE. My dear chap!

HENRY. Old Glaisher is a perfect noodle.

EUSTACE. Naturally. How much does a little country doctor make hereabouts? Four hundred a year? Say four hundred and fifty. You can't expect a first-rate intellect for that. 'Tisn't the market rate.

HENRY. I don't expect an absolute idiot.

EUSTACE. Glaisher doesn't *know* anything of course, but his manner is magnificently impressive. After he's talked to me for five minutes, felt my pulse, and looked at my tongue I almost begin to wonder whether I'm not really ill after all. That's a great gift for a doctor!

HENRY. You're perfectly well. Any fool can see that merely by looking at you. And old Glaisher goes on with his mixture and his glass of port at eleven. Bah! [EUSTACE *laughs.*] And you encourage him. How many visits has he paid you?

EUSTACE. I don't know. Seven or eight.

HENRY. And every one of them completely unnecessary.

EUSTACE. Completely unnecessary for me, but very useful to old Glaisher, considering they mean half a guinea apiece to him.

HENRY. Which the Governor pays.

EUSTACE. Which the Governor pays, as you say. That's why I do it. Somebody must keep old Glaisher going, or what would become of all the little Glaishers? Here's the Governor with piles of money to throw away on Parliamentary elections and similar tomfoolery. Why shouldn't I divert some of it to old Glaisher? I like the little man.

HENRY. You're awfully generous—with other people's money.

EUSTACE. I am. Whose money are *you* generous with?

[HENRY *goes up stage.*

[HENRY *snorts with disapproval. Enter left from garden* MR *and* MRS JACKSON *in outdoor things, as from a luncheon-party.*

Morning, Father. I've not seen you before to-day. You went out before I got down.

MR JACKSON [*gruffly, sitting down*]. Good morning.

[MRS JACKSON, *having kissed* EUSTACE, *sits.*

EUSTACE. Morning, Mummy. [*To* MR JACKSON] By the way, you've just missed one of your Election Committee.

MR JACKSON [*alarmed*]. Not Sir John? It's only half-past three.

EUSTACE. No—only little Glaisher. He said he was too early. However, as *you* weren't there he came and had a look at *me*.

MRS JACKSON. What did he say, dear?

EUSTACE. Said I was getting on all right. He's coming to have another look at me in a day or two.

MR JACKSON. When does he think you'll be well enough to get to work again?

EUSTACE. I don't know. I didn't ask him.

MRS JACKSON. Oh, Samuel, it's too soon to think of that *yet*! [MRS JACKSON *sits at table.*] The poor boy's only convalescent. Wait till Doctor Glaisher has stopped his visits. [*Snort from* HENRY.

EUSTACE. My dear Henry, what extraordinary noises you make. It's a terrible habit. You should see some one about it. Why not consult Glaisher? [HENRY *goes up angrily.*

MR JACKSON [*to his wife*]. As you please, dear. Still, I *should* like to know what Eustace intends to do when he *is* well enough. I'm bound to say he looks perfectly well.

EUSTACE [*blandly*]. Appearances are so deceptive, Father.

[*Enter* VIOLET *from house. She has some work in her hands.*

VIOLET. Got back, Mother dear? [*Kisses her.*] Enjoyed your lunch?

MRS JACKSON. Very much. It was quite a large party.

VIOLET [*sitting down*]. What did you talk about?

MRS JACKSON. About your father's election principally. They say Parliament may dissolve any day now. What are you making, dear?

VIOLET. Handkerchiefs. I promised Eustace I'd work some initials for him.

MR JACKSON [*returning doggedly to his subject*]. Perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what your plans are, Eustace.

EUSTACE. I haven't any plans, Father.

MR JACKSON. You haven't any?

MRS JACKSON. Eustace said the other day he thought he would like to be a doctor.

MR JACKSON. A doctor! Nonsense.

MRS JACKSON. Well, I only tell you what he said.

EUSTACE. My remark was not intended to be taken literally. I don't seriously propose to enter the medical profession.

MR JACKSON [*irritably*]. Do you seriously propose anything?

EUSTACE. No, Father. I don't know that I do.

MR JACKSON [*meditatively*]. I might perhaps find you a place in the office.

HENRY [*firmly*]. No, Father. *I* object to that.

VIOLET. Henry!

HENRY. Yes, I do. I object to the office being used as a dumping-ground for incompetents.

MRS JACKSON. Henry! Your own brother!

HENRY. I can't help that. I don't see why the firm should be

expected to pay a salary to some one who's no earthly use merely because he's my brother.

MR JACKSON. Still, we might try him.

HENRY. My dear father, why not face the truth? You know what Eustace is. We got him into Jenkins' office. He made nothing of it. Then he was in the Gloucester and Wiltshire Bank. No use there. He tried farming. Same result. Finally you gave him a thousand pounds to settle in Australia. That was five years ago, and here he is back again without a sixpence.

MRS JACKSON. Eustace has been very unlucky.

HENRY [*impatiently*]. What has luck got to do with it? Eustace doesn't *work*. That's what's the matter with *him*.

MRS JACKSON. Still, if he had another chance——

HENRY. My dear mother, you always believe people ought to have another chance. It's a little mania with you. Eustace has had dozens of chances. He's made a mess of every one of them. You know that as well as I do.

MR JACKSON. Yes. There's no use hiding it from ourselves.

HENRY. Not the least—as we can't hide it from anyone else.

MR JACKSON [*after a pause*]. Well, Eustace, what do *you* think?

EUSTACE [*airily*]. I? Oh, I agree with Henry. [*Lights another cigarette.*

MR JACKSON. You *what*?

EUSTACE. I agree with Henry. I think he's diagnosed the case with great accuracy. Henry ought to have been a doctor too!

MR JACKSON [*getting up angrily and making an oration*]. Now look here, Eustace. I've had enough of this. You seem to imagine because you've been ill [EUSTACE *grins at* HENRY] and come home in rags nothing more in the way of work is to be expected of you. You're to loll about in a hammock smoking cigarettes and taking not the smallest interest in any plans that are suggested for your future. Henry says the reason you've always been a failure is that you don't work, and you say you agree with him. Very well. What I have to tell you is I'm not going to have you loafing away your time here. I disapprove of loafing on principle. Both as a public man and as a private man I disapprove of it. There's far too much of it in England to-day. That's where the Germans are ahead of us. Young men who ought to be at business or in the professions idle away their time and live on their parents. That won't do for *me*. I insist upon your getting something to do at once and doing it. I insist upon it. If you don't——

[*During the last sentence of this impassioned oration* SIR JOHN *and* LADY FARINGFORD *and* STELLA *enter right, shown in by* BAINES.

BAINES. Sir John and Lady Faringford, Miss Faringford.

[*Instant change of front on the part of the whole family.* MR

JACKSON *stops short in the midst of his eloquence and hurriedly substitutes a glassy smile for the irascible sternness which accompanied his speech.* MRS JACKSON *and the others who had listened in uncomfortable silence hastily assume the conventional simper of politeness as they rise to receive their guests. The only person who remains quite self-possessed is* EUSTACE, *though he too smiles slightly as he gets out of hammock.*

EUSTACE [*aside to* HENRY, *who comes down*]. Poor old Governor! Stemmed in full tide. [*General greetings.*

MRS JACKSON. Dear Lady Faringford. How nice of you to come! Stella, my dear. [*Shakes hands with her and* SIR JOHN.

LADY FARINGFORD [*to* VIOLET]. As Sir John was due at your father's Committee at four, Stella and I thought we would drive him down.

MRS JACKSON. You'll stay and have some tea now you're here of course!

LADY FARINGFORD. Thank you. Tea *would* be very pleasant.

STELLA. How do you do? [*Shaking hands with* HENRY] And how is the invalid? Getting on well?

HENRY [*grimly*]. Excellently. [HENRY *stands behind her.*

STELLA. That's right. [*Shakes hands with* EUSTACE. *To* HENRY] He really looks better, doesn't he? Doctor Glaisher says it's been a wonderful recovery.

HENRY. I suppose he does.

STELLA [*to* MR JACKSON]. How glad you must be to have him home again!

MR JACKSON [*with ghastly attempt at effusion*]. It's a great pleasure of course.

STELLA. It must be so sad for parents when their children go away from them. But I suppose sons *will* go away sometimes, however hard their parents try to keep them. Won't they?

MR JACKSON. That does happen sometimes—er—unquestionably. [*More briskly*] And, anyhow, young men can't stay at home always, my dear Miss Faringford. They have their own way to make in the world.

STELLA. And so the parents *have* to let them go. It seems hard. But then when they come back it must be delightful.

EUSTACE. *It is.*

SIR JOHN. Hadn't we better be going in, Jackson? I shan't be able to stay very long. I have to meet my agent at five-fifteen sharp to see about some fences.

MR JACKSON [*looks at watch*]. It's barely four yet. We'd better wait a minute or two. Glaisher will arrive directly, and then we can get to work.

[EUSTACE, *taking advantage of* MR JACKSON'S *speaking to* SIR JOHN, *moves towards* STELLA.

SIR JOHN. Ling's advertised to speak at Maytree, I see, to-morrow week.

MR JACKSON. Is he? At Maytree? That's rather out of his country.

SIR JOHN. Yes. He doesn't go down so well in the villages. Thank heaven agriculture is still Conservative! They go to his meetings, though.

STELLA. Mr Ling is such a good speaker, they say.

EUSTACE. My father is a good speaker too when he's roused, Miss Faringford. You should have heard him ten minutes ago.

SIR JOHN. What was he speaking on?

EUSTACE [*airily*]. The Unemployed. [MR JACKSON *scowls at him.*

SIR JOHN. I congratulate you, Jackson. It isn't all sons who are so appreciative of their father's efforts. *My* son never listens to *me*!

[MR JACKSON *smiles a sickly smile.*

BAINES [*announcing*]. Doctor Glaisher.

[GLAISHER *enters.* EUSTACE *and* STELLA *move left.* HENRY *follows them, and tries to join them without success.*

MR JACKSON. Ah, here you are, doctor. I began to think you weren't coming.

MRS JACKSON [*shaking hands*]. Good afternoon. Why didn't you bring Mrs Glaisher? She and I and Lady Faringford could have entertained each other while you were all at your Committee.

DR GLAISHER. She would have enjoyed it of all things. But I left her at home with the children. Tommy has the whooping cough just now, and requires a lot of nursing.

MRS JACKSON. Poor little chap. I hope he'll be better soon.

MR JACKSON [*looking at watch*]. Well, well. I'm afraid we ought to go in. Come, Sir John. Are you ready, doctor? Shall I lead the way? [*Fusses off importantly.*] Come, Henry.

SIR JOHN. By all means.

MRS JACKSON [*calling after him*]. As you are going would you mind ringing the bell, Samuel, and telling Baines to bring tea out here?

MR JACKSON. Very well, my dear.

[*Exit* HENRY *by lower door. Exeunt right* MR JACKSON, SIR JOHN, *and* DOCTOR. EUSTACE, *having lifted up the hammock for* VIOLET *and* STELLA, *listens politely to them.*

LADY FARINGFORD [*at centre table with* MRS JACKSON]. I do hope your husband will be elected, Mrs Jackson. Mr Ling has the most dreadful opinions about land—and, indeed, about everything else I'm told. But that is of less importance.

MRS JACKSON. Indeed?

LADY FARINGFORD. Oh, yes. Only a year ago at a meeting of the Parish Council he made a speech attacking Sir John quite violently about one of his cottages. It was let to young Barrett, quite a respectable, hard-working man—who afterwards died of pneumonia. Mr Ling declared the cottage was damp and not fit for anyone to live in. So ridiculous of him! As if *all* cottages were not damp. The absurd part of it was that afterwards when Mrs Barrett was left a widow, and Sir John gave her notice because she couldn't pay her rent and he wanted to convert the cottage into pigsties, Mr Ling was equally indignant, and seemed to think we ought to find Mrs Barrett another house! I don't think he can be quite right in his head.

[BAINES *and* FOOTMAN *bring out tea on large tray and put it on table.*

VIOLET [*rising*]. Shall I make the tea, Mother?

MRS JACKSON. If you please, dear. [EUSTACE *stands by* STELLA.

EUSTACE. What do *you* think about damp cottages, Miss Faringford? Do *you* think they ought to be left standing in order that the labourer may live in them—and have pneumonia? Or be pulled down in order that the labourer may have nowhere to live at all?

[VIOLET *helps* LADY FARINGFORD *to tea.*

STELLA [*sits*]. I don't know. I think it's dreadful there should be damp cottages anywhere.

EUSTACE. That would never do. There must be good cottages and bad cottages in order that the strong may get the good cottages and the weak the bad.

STELLA. You mean in order that the strong may have the bad cottages and the weak the good. They need them more.

EUSTACE. That would be quite unscientific. No, the strong must have the good cottages in order that they may grow stronger, and the weak must have the bad cottages in order that they may die off. Survival of the fittest, you know.

STELLA. How horrible!

EUSTACE. Yes, but how necessary!

LADY FARINGFORD. Come over here, Stella. You have the sun on your face there.

STELLA [*rising unwillingly*]. Very well, Mamma. [*Goes and sits left.*

LADY FARINGFORD. By the way, Mrs Jackson, have you heard about poor Miss Higgs, who used to keep the school at Little Chedleigh and play the harmonium so badly on Sundays? You remember her? Quite a good creature, knew all kinds of subjects and never expected one to take any notice of her. So of course one never did. Well, two years ago—[*to* EUSTACE, *who offers her cake*] no, thank you—an aunt died and left her a little money, and Miss Higgs retired and went to live in Gloucester. One of those unattractive houses near the canal.

But she seems to have been quite incapable of managing money. Put it into a gold-mine, I believe, or gave it to her solicitor to invest—which comes to the same thing—and lost every penny.

MRS JACKSON. Oh! *Poor* Miss Higgs. What a sad thing!

LADY FARINGFORD. Fortunately she was so affected by her loss that she drowned herself in the canal at the bottom of her garden. Otherwise I'm afraid some sort of a subscription would have had to be got up for her.

[EUSTACE *gets another cup of tea from* VIOLET, *and takes advantage of the move to sit down by* STELLA. *He at once begins to talk to her in dumbshow.*

VIOLET. I liked Miss Higgs very much, Lady Faringford.

[*From this point* LADY FARINGFORD *keeps watching* STELLA *out of the corner of her eye, and showing by her manner her annoyance at* EUSTACE'S *marked attentions to her daughter.* MRS JACKSON *and* VIOLET *are completely unconscious of this by-play.*

LADY FARINGFORD. So did quite a number of people, I'm told. She was quite a good creature, as I said, much superior to the young woman who has succeeded her at Little Chedleigh. [*Takes tea from* VIOLET.] I wanted them to give the place to my maid Dawkins, who is getting rather past her work and really could have taught everything that is necessary or wholesome for the lower orders to learn, though I dare say she would have had some difficulty with the harmonium—at first. However, they preferred to get down a young person from London with the most elaborate qualifications. So highly educated, in fact, that I hear she can't *teach* at all.

MRS JACKSON. How very awkward.

LADY FARINGFORD. It is indeed. [*Here* EUSTACE *sits by* STELLA. *Takes his tea from* VIOLET.] Stella!

STELLA. Yes, Mamma.

LADY FARINGFORD. Say good-bye to Mrs Jackson, my dear. We really must be going. [*Rising.*

MRS JACKSON [*rising also*]. Shall I let Sir John know you are ready?

LADY FARINGFORD. Pray don't trouble. We can pick him up as we go through the house. Good-bye, Mrs Jackson. [*To* EUSTACE, *shaking hands*] Good-bye. When do you go back to Australia? *Quite* soon, I hope. Come, Stella.

STELLA [*shaking hands*]. Good-bye, Mr Jackson.

[*Exeunt* LADY FARINGFORD *and* STELLA *right, escorted by* VIOLET. *A pause,* EUSTACE *sits at centre table indolently.*

EUSTACE. Clever woman that.

MRS JACKSON. Is she, dear? I hadn't noticed.

EUSTACE. Yes. We're all of us selfish. But most of us make an effort to conceal the fact. With the result that we are always being asked to do something for somebody and having to invent elaborate excuses for not doing it. And that makes us very unpopular. For every one hates asking for anything—unless he gets it. But Lady Faringford proclaims her selfishness so openly that no one ever dreams of asking her to do things. It would be tempting Providence. With the result that I expect she's quite a popular woman.

MRS JACKSON. I'm so glad you like Lady Faringford, dear. Your father has the highest opinion of her.

EUSTACE. The Governor never could see an inch before his nose.

MRS JACKSON. Can't he, dear? He has never said anything about it.

EUSTACE [*affectionately*]. Dear Mother! [VIOLET *returns*.] Seen the Gorgon safely off the premises?

VIOLET [*laughing*]. Yes—and Sir John.

MRS JACKSON. The Committee was over, then?

VIOLET. It is now—as Lady Faringford insisted on carrying off the chairman. Here's Father.

[*Enter* MR JACKSON *and* HENRY, *followed by* BAINES *with letters on salver*. BAINES *hands letters, three to* MR JACKSON, *two to* MRS JACKSON, *one to* VIOLET. HENRY *sits*.

BAINES. Shall I take away, madam?

MRS JACKSON. Wait a moment. [*To* MR JACKSON] Will you have any tea, Samuel?

MR JACKSON [*opening long envelope and reading papers*]. No. We had some indoors.

MRS JACKSON [*to* BAINES]. Yes, you can take away. [*To* MR JACKSON] Did you have a successful meeting?

[BAINES *and* FOOTMAN *take away tea*.

MR JACKSON [*standing by table, reading still*]. Eh? Oh, yes.

MRS JACKSON [*to* HENRY]. What a pity Sir John had to go!

HENRY [*by his father*]. It didn't matter. We'd pretty nearly got through our business.

[MRS JACKSON *opens letter and becomes absorbed in its contents*.

MR JACKSON [*handing papers to* HENRY]. You'd better look through these. They're from Fisher and Thompson. It's about Wenhams' mill. The sale is next week.

HENRY [*nods*]. Very well.

MR JACKSON [*sits at table*]. Now, Eustace, I want to have a serious talk with you.

EUSTACE. Not *again*, Father!

MR JACKSON [*puzzled*]. What do you mean?

EUSTACE. Couldn't you put it off till to-morrow? I'm hardly well enough to talk seriously twice in one day.

MR JACKSON. Nonsense, sir. You're perfectly well. Glaisher says there's no longer the slightest cause for anxiety.

EUSTACE. Traitor!

MR JACKSON. What, sir?

EUSTACE. Nothing, Father.

MR JACKSON. As I told you before tea, I'm not going to have you idling away your time here. The question is, what are we to do?

EUSTACE. Just so, Father.

MR JACKSON. I mean, what are *you* to do? [*Pause, no remark from* EUSTACE.] Lady Faringford said as she went away you ought to go back to Australia. She said it was a thousand pities for any young man *not* to go to Australia.

MRS JACKSON. Eustace was just saying how clever Lady Faringford was when you came out.

MR JACKSON. I'm glad to hear it. Well, what do you think?

EUSTACE. About Australia?

MR JACKSON. Yes.

EUSTACE. I don't think anything about it.

MR JACKSON. Would you like to go out there again?

EUSTACE. No, I shouldn't. I've been there once. It was an utter failure.

MR JACKSON. *You* were a failure, you mean.

EUSTACE. As you please. Anyway, it was no good, and I had to work as a navvy on the railway. I don't propose to do that again.

HENRY [*looking up*]. Other people do well in Australia.

EUSTACE. Other people do well in England. Or rather, the same people do well in both.

MR JACKSON [*peevishly*]. What *do* you mean?

EUSTACE. Simply that the kind of qualities which make for success in one country make for success in another. It's just as easy to fail in Sydney as in London. I've done it, and I know.

MRS JACKSON [*who has just opened her second letter*]. A letter from Janet. She is going to be at Gloucester next week, and would like to come over to see us on Friday. We aren't going out on that day, are we, Violet?

[MR JACKSON, *impatient at this interruption, opens one of the letters in his hand and glances at it.*

VIOLET. No, Mother.

MRS JACKSON. That will do, then. She'd better come to luncheon. [*Rises.*] I'll write and tell her at once, before I forget.

VIOLET. Shall I do it, Mother?

MRS JACKSON. No, dear. I can manage it. [*Exit to house.*

MR JACKSON [*who has opened one letter and glanced at it opens second*]. Well! [*Strikes table with clenched fist.*

VIOLET. What is it, Father?

MR JACKSON. What's the meaning of this, I wonder! Barton must be out of his senses.

VIOLET. Barton!

MR JACKSON. Yes, Barton, the tailor. Why does he send me in a bill like this? [HENRY *comes down left of* MR JACKSON.] Twenty-five pounds. And I've had nothing from him since Easter. Listen to this. One lounge suit four guineas, one dress suit eight guineas, one flannel suit three pounds ten, another lounge suit four guineas. One frock coat and waistcoat four guineas, one pair of trousers one guinea. Total twenty-five pounds eleven.

EUSTACE. They're mine, Father.

MR JACKSON. What, sir!

EUSTACE. Some clothes I ordered. I told him to send the bill to you. That's all right, isn't it?

MR JACKSON [*exploding*]. All right! Certainly not, sir. It's very far from all right. It's a great liberty.

EUSTACE. My dear father, the bill must be sent in to somebody.

MR JACKSON. And why not to you, pray?

EUSTACE. What would be the good of that, Father? I've nothing to pay it with.

MR JACKSON [*fuming*]. Then you shouldn't have ordered the things.

EUSTACE. But I must wear something. I couldn't go on wearing Henry's things indefinitely. It's hard on *him*! [HENRY *snorts*.] My dear Henry!

MR JACKSON. But what's become of all the clothes you had? You must have had *some* clothes.

EUSTACE [*shrugs*]. They're in London—and in rags.

MR JACKSON. Now look here, Eustace. I'm not going to have this. I'm not going to have a son of mine running up bills here.

EUSTACE. All right, Father. I'm quite willing to pay for the things—if you give me the money.

MR JACKSON. I shall *not* give you the money, sir. If you want money you must earn it.

EUSTACE. That doesn't take us very far.

MR JACKSON. You'll disgrace me. [MR JACKSON *rises and invokes the heavens*.] That's what will happen. I insist on your paying Barton and giving me your word of honour never to get anything on credit here again. [*Thrusts bill into* EUSTACE's *hand, then tramps about angrily*.

EUSTACE. I've no objection. I don't run up tailors' bills for pleasure. I'd just as soon pay ready money as you would. Only I haven't got it. Give me twenty pounds—no, twenty-five pounds eleven—and I'll pay Barton to-morrow.

MR JACKSON. I decline to give you money. I decline. Your request is impudent.

EUSTACE. Let's keep our tempers, Father.

MR JACKSON. *What*, sir?

EUSTACE. I suggested we should keep our tempers. That's all.

MR JACKSON. This is intolerable. I disown you, sir. I disown you.

VIOLET. Father!

MR JACKSON. Be silent, Violet. [*To* EUSTACE] I'll have nothing more to do with you. I'll pay this debt to Barton and any others you may have incurred since you came back. After that I've done with you. Leave my house at once.

EUSTACE [*rising, very calm, and, first putting chair in its place, then speaking with ominous distinctness*]. Very well, Father. I'll go if you wish it. [*Movement for* MR JACKSON.] But I warn you if I do go it will be to the nearest workhouse!

MR JACKSON [*fuming*]. That's your affair. It has nothing to do with me. [*Turns away.*

EUSTACE. I question that. It rather knocks your election prospects on the head, I fancy.

MR JACKSON [*swinging round*]. Eh? What?

EUSTACE. You don't seriously suppose if I do this *you'll* be returned for Parliament? If you do you don't know the British electorate. This is going to be a scandal, a scandal worth five hundred votes to the other side. And the last man's majority was only fifty. Oh, no, my dear father, if it comes out that the son of the rich Conservative candidate is in the local workhouse, good-bye to your chances in *this* constituency.

HENRY. You wouldn't dare!

EUSTACE. Dare? Nonsense. What have I to lose?

HENRY. But this is infamous. It's blackmail.

EUSTACE. Call it what you like. It's what I propose to do if you force me to it.

VIOLET. Eustace! You couldn't be so wicked!

EUSTACE. My dear Vi, have I any choice? Here am I absolutely penniless. The Governor flies into a rage because I order some clothes from his tailor and turns me into the street. What am I to do? I've no profession, no business I can turn my hand to. I might take to manual labour, break stones on the road. But that would only bring equal discredit on this highly respectable family. In England sons of wealthy cloth-manufacturers don't work with their hands. Besides, I don't like work. So there's nothing left but to beg. If I beg in the street the police will take me up. Therefore I must beg from my relations If they refuse me I must go on the parish.

HENRY. Father, this is monstrous. I wouldn't submit to it if I

were you. If he wants to prevent your election let him. I advise you to refuse.

EUSTACE. All right. But it knocks *your* prospects on the head too, my dear Henry, social advancement and love's young dream, you know. Miss Faringford won't marry you if this happens. Her mother won't let her. You're not so rich as all that. And if her mother would, Stella wouldn't. Stella rather likes me. In fact, I think she likes me better than she does you at present. I'm not absolutely certain she wouldn't marry me if I asked her.

HENRY. Lady Faringford would forbid her.

EUSTACE. Perhaps we shouldn't consult her. Anyhow, if you leave me to eat skilly in Chedleigh Workhouse, Stella won't accept you. I lay you ten to one on it. [*A pause. Gong rings.*] Well, what do you say? [*Long silence,* MR JACKSON *obviously not knowing what to do.* HENRY *equally uncomfortable.*] Nothing? [*Still silence.*] *You,* Henry, *you're* full of resource. What do *you* think? [*Still silence. With a shrug*] Well, first gong's gone. *I* shall go and dress for dinner

[*Strolls off right.*

[HENRY *snorts and goes up stage.*

## ACT IV

SCENE: *The drawing-room at Chedleigh, as in Act I. Occasional table near sofa. When curtain rises* MRS JACKSON *and* VIOLET *are discovered.* VIOLET *is playing softly at piano,* MRS JACKSON *sitting by fireplace nodding over a piece of work of some kind. Presently enter* EUSTACE. VIOLET *stops playing, closes piano, and comes down; later takes up handkerchief she is working for* EUSTACE. EUSTACE *strolls to his mother.*

MRS JACKSON [*waking up, drowsily*]. Is that you, Eustace? Where's your father?

EUSTACE. In the library with Henry.

MRS JACKSON. Talking business?

EUSTACE [*nods*]. Yes.

MRS JACKSON. Can you see the time, Vi?

VIOLET [*sitting by fireplace*]. Nearly ten, Mother dear.

MRS JACKSON. So late! They must be discussing something very important.

EUSTACE [*grimly*]. They are.

MRS JACKSON. Have they been long in the library?

EUSTACE. They went directly you and Vi left the table.

MRS JACKSON. And you've been alone in the dining-room all that time? Why didn't you come in to us?

EUSTACE. I thought they might want to consult me.

MRS JACKSON. About business? I'm so glad. I'm sure you would be most useful in the business if you tried, though Henry doesn't think so.

EUSTACE. Are you, Mother?

MRS JACKSON. Of course. Why not? Henry is. And you always learnt your lessons far quicker than Henry when you were a boy.

EUSTACE [*laying hand on her shoulder*]. Flatterer!

MRS JACKSON [*putting work into work-basket*]. Well, I don't think I'll stay up any longer. [*Rises.*] And I do hope Henry won't keep your father up too late. It can't be good for him. [*Kisses* EUSTACE.] Good night, dear. Sleep well. Are you coming, Violet? [*Kisses her.*

VIOLET. Directly, Mother.

[EUSTACE *holds door open for her to go out. Then comes slowly down and sits in chair by* VIOLET *at centre table.*

EUSTACE. Dear old Mother. She's not clever, but for real goodness of heart I don't know her equal.

VIOLET [*impatiently*]. Clever! I'm sick of cleverness. What's the good of it? You're *clever*. What has it done for you?

EUSTACE. Kept me out of prison. That's always something. [VIOLET *makes gesture of protest.*] Oh, yes, it has. There have been times when I was so hard up I felt I would do anything, *anything*, just for a square meal. If I had been a stupid man I should have done it. I should have robbed a till or forged a cheque, and that would have been the end of me. Fortunately I'd brains enough to realize that that kind of thing always gets found out. So here I am, still a blameless member of society. [VIOLET *says nothing, but goes on working. Pause.*] The Mater hasn't been told?

VIOLET. About what happened before dinner? No.

EUSTACE. I'm glad of that.

VIOLET. Why?

EUSTACE. My dear Vi, I'm not absolutely inhuman. Because I'm fond of her, of course, and don't like giving her pain.

VIOLET. She'll have to know sooner or later.

EUSTACE. Then I'd rather it was later, in fact when I'm not here. If anybody has got to suffer on my account, I'd rather not see it.

VIOLET. And you call Lady Faringford selfish!

EUSTACE [*carelessly*]. Yes. It's a quality I particularly dislike—in others. [*Pause.*

VIOLET. I can't understand you. As a boy you were so different. You were kind and affectionate and thoughtful for others.

EUSTACE [*shrugs*]. I dare say.

VIOLET. And now——! Think what you have made of your life! You had good abilities. You might have done almost anything if you had only tried. You might have been a successful, honourable man with an assured position and a record you could be proud of. You might . . .

EUSTACE [*putting his fingers in his ears*]. Stop, Vi. Stop, I tell you. I won't listen to you.

VIOLET [*surprised*]. Why not?

EUSTACE [*doggedly*]. Because I won't. All that is over. What's past is past. I have to live my life now. Do you suppose it would make it any easier for me to grizzle over wasted opportunities? No! As each year passes I turn over the page and forget it.

VIOLET [*wondering*]. And do you never look back?

EUSTACE [*with a slight shiver*]. Never! If I did I should have drowned myself long ago.

VIOLET [*with horror*]. Eustace!

EUSTACE. Oh, my dear Vi, it's all very well for you to preach, but you don't understand. It's easy enough for you living comfortably here at home working for your bazaars and visiting your old women. Your life slips away in a quiet round of small duties, paying calls with the Mater, pouring out the Governor's coffee. One day just like another. You've no anxieties, no temptations. The lines have fallen to you in pleasant places. And you think you can sit in judgment on me!

VIOLET [*quietly*]. You think my life happier than yours, then?

EUSTACE. Isn't it?

VIOLET. No. *Your* life is your own. You can do as you please with it, use it or waste it as you think best. You are free. I am not. You think, because I stay quietly at home, doing the duty that lies nearest me and not crying out against Fate, therefore I've nothing more to wish for! Would *you* be happy, do you suppose, if you were in my case? I live here down in Chedleigh from year's end to year's end. Mother never leaves home. She doesn't care to pay visits. So I cannot either. I may sometimes get away for a few days, a week, perhaps, but very seldom. And as Mother grows older I shall go less. Soon people will give up asking me when they find I always refuse. And so I shall be left here alone with no friends, no real companionship, merely one of the family, obliged to know the people they know, visit the people they visit, not a grown woman with interests of her own and a life to order as she pleases.

EUSTACE. But you'll marry——

VIOLET. Marry! What chance have I of marrying now? When we hadn't so much money, and Henry and Father weren't so set on taking a position in the County, there was some chance for me. Now

there is none. It's all very well for Henry. He is a partner in the firm. He will be a very rich man. He can marry Stella Faringford. Oh, we are to be great people! But you don't find Sir John Faringford's son proposing to *me*! No! He wants a girl of his own class or else an heiress, not a manufacturer's daughter with a few thousand pounds. So the great people won't marry me and I mustn't marry the little people. Father wouldn't like it. He hardly lets Mother ask them to the house nowadays. And so the years go by and my youth with them, and I know it will be like this always, always.

EUSTACE. Poor old Vi! And I thought you were quite contented with your bazaars and your old women. Why don't you speak to the Mater?

VIOLET [*resuming her work*]. What's the use? Mother wouldn't understand. She married when she was twenty-one. She doesn't know what it is for a girl to go on living at home long after she's grown up and ought to have a house of her own. So I stay on here knitting socks for Old Allen and working *your* handkerchiefs, and here I shall stay till Mother and Father are both dead. . . . And then it will be too late.

EUSTACE. Poor old Vi! . . . [*A pause.*] Do you know, you make me feel rather mean. Henry and the Governor I can stand up to. They're very much like me. We belong to the predatory type. Only they're more successful than I am. They live on their workpeople. I propose to live on them. We're birds of a feather. But you're different. I suppose you get it from the Mater.

VIOLET. Why are you so bitter against your father?

EUSTACE. Am I?

VIOLET. Yes. Just now. And this afternoon.

EUSTACE [*shrugs*]. Oh, that——! Well, the fact is, I wanted to bring things to a head. I feel I can't stay here. I must get away.

VIOLET. Why?

EUSTACE. For lots of reasons. I can't stand this place—I've outgrown it, I suppose. [*Pause.*] And then there's Stella. . . .

VIOLET. Stella?

EUSTACE. Yes. If I were here much longer I might be falling in love with Stella. And that wouldn't be fair to Henry. After all, he was first in the field. And it wouldn't be fair to her either. I'm not fit to marry a girl like that. No. I must get away.

VIOLET. Poor Eustace!

EUSTACE. Oh, you needn't pity me. I shall get along somehow. My life hasn't been successful. It hasn't even been honourable. But it's been devilish interesting. [*Enter* MR JACKSON *and* HENRY.

MR JACKSON. You here, Vi? I thought you'd have gone to bed Your mother went long ago, I expect?

VIOLET. Only a few minutes.

MR JACKSON. Well run away now, dear. It's late.

VIOLET. Very well, Father. [*Gathers up her things and rises.*] Good night. [*Kisses him.*] Good night, Henry. Good night, Eustace.

EUSTACE [*taking her hand*]. Good night, Vi. And good-bye.

[*Holds open door for her.*

[*She kisses him and exit.*

[*While* VIOLET *has been getting her things together* MR JACKSON *has been showing obvious signs of nervous impatience. Even* HENRY *has fidgeted. When* VIOLET *has gone* EUSTACE *sits on settee.*

EUSTACE. Well?

MR JACKSON. Ahem! We have been in consultation, your brother and I, as to the right course to adopt with regard to you.

EUSTACE [*nods*]. So I supposed. [HENRY *sits in chair at top table.*

MR JACKSON. After the extraordinary and undutiful attitude you took up this afternoon, I might naturally have declined all further relations with you. But . . .

EUSTACE [*matter-of-fact*]. But as that course might prove almost as disagreeable for yourself as it would for me, you naturally thought better of it. Let's get on.

MR JACKSON [*rearing under this touch of the spur, but mastering himself*]. I might point out to you that we, your mother and I, have never failed in our duty by you. We have been indulgent parents. You were sent to a first-rate school. Nothing was spared that could make you a prosperous and successful man. But I won't speak of that.

EUSTACE [*drily*]. Thanks, Father.

MR JACKSON [*running on*]. I might point out that we have given you a score of good chances for establishing yourself in a satisfactory position, and you have failed to profit by them. I might remind you that since you returned to this roof . . .

EUSTACE [*impatiently*]. My dear father, I thought you were going to leave that part out? And I do wish you wouldn't begin talking about your *roof*. When people refer to their *roof* I always know they're going to suggest something quite unpractical. In ordinary times they don't soar above the ceiling. But in moments of fervour off goes the roof! Let's come to the point.

MR JACKSON [*collecting himself again*]. I will do so at once. Your brother and I feel that little as you have deserved this consideration at my hands, and wholly as you have forfeited all claim to further assistance, both by your past failures and by your conduct this afternoon, you should yet be given one more chance.

[*During the latter part of this speech and the beginning of the*

*next* EUSTACE *insensibly begins to beat time to his father's impassioned antithesis.*

EUSTACE. Come, that's satisfactory.

MR JACKSON. Five years ago when, after repeated failures on your part, after paying your debts more than once and finding you openings again and again, I sent you to Australia, I gave you a thousand pounds to make a career for yourself. I told you that was the last sum of money you would have from me during my lifetime. What may or may not come to you after my death is another matter. And I gave it you on the express stipulation that if you lost or squandered it you were not to write for more.

EUSTACE. I kept that stipulation.

MR JACKSON. That is so. I now propose to do again what I did five years ago. I propose to send you back to Australia with a thousand pounds.

HENRY [*looking up from book, which he has been appearing to read*]. To be paid to you *after* your arrival there.

MR JACKSON. Quite so. I will send the thousand pounds, less the cost of your passage, to an agent to be paid to you on your landing. In return you are to promise not to come back to this country without my express permission. I think you will agree with me that the course I am taking is a kinder one than you deserve. Few fathers would do as much. I might have named a smaller sum. But I prefer to err on the generous side.

EUSTACE [*nodding*]. Quite so. And what do you propose that I should do with a thousand pounds.

MR JACKSON. That is for you to decide. You might start in business.

EUSTACE. I've tried that.

MR JACKSON. Sheep-farming.

EUSTACE. I've tried that.

MR JACKSON. Gold-mining.

EUSTACE. I've tried that.

MR JACKSON. Well, well, any line which you think offers you a favourable opening.

EUSTACE [*insinuatingly*]. And which line is that?

MR JACKSON [*irritably*]. *I* don't know.

EUSTACE. No more do I. [*Pause.*] No, Father, it would be absurd for me to accept your offer, because it isn't practical. It would only be throwing your money away. It would do me no good, and cause you heartfelt distress.

MR JACKSON. Nonsense. Other young fellows go out to Australia with less than a thousand pounds and make fortunes, far less. Why shouldn't you?

EUSTACE. Why, indeed? However, we must keep to the point. *They* make fortunes. *I* don't.

MR JACKSON [*exasperated*]. In fact, they're active and energetic, you're useless and worthless. Where other people by thrift and enterprise and steady application make money, you only lose it.

EUSTACE. Exactly. I lose it. And doubtless for lack of the qualities you mention. What then? Granted I am all you say, how does that help us? Here I am, alive, and requiring food at the customary intervals. Who is going to give it me? [HENRY *snorts*.] Really, Henry!

MR JACKSON [*hotly*]. That is to say you *want* to go through life sponging on your family instead of working for your living like an honest man.

EUSTACE [*getting annoyed, rises, and goes across to his father*]. Look here, Father, hadn't we better drop all that stuff about *wanting* to sponge on one's family and the rest of it? Nobody *wants* to sponge on other people. The idea's preposterous. We all *want* to be prosperous and highly respected members of society like you and Henry, with more money than we know what to do with, with a seat in Parliament and a wife out of the baronetage. That's what we *want*! And if we haven't the luck or the brains or the energy to get it, you needn't call us names. You don't suppose I *prefer* losing money to making it, do you? You don't suppose if I had my *choice* I should drift about the world adding up accounts in a filthy Hong-Kong bank, or playing steward on a filthier ocean liner? You can't be so ridiculous. [HENRY *comes down*.] I'm good for nothing, as you say. I've no push, no initiative, no staying power. I shall never be anything but a failure. But don't imagine I *like* it! You seem to think you've a terrible grievance because I'm a ne'er-do-well and come to you for money, but the real grievance is mine.

HENRY [*tartly*]. If you don't like coming on your family for money, you needn't do it.

EUSTACE [*impatiently*]. It's not what I do, but what I am that is the difficulty. What does it matter what one *does*? It's done, and then it's over and one can forget it. The real tragedy is what one *is*. Because one can't escape from that. It's always there, the bundle of passions, weaknesses, stupidities, that one calls character, waiting to trip one up. Look at the Governor, that pillar of rectitude and business ability! Do you suppose *he* could be like me if he tried? Of course not. Nor could I be like him.

MR JACKSON. Have you no will?

EUSTACE. No. Have you? Have we any of us? Aren't we just the creatures of our upbringing, of circumstance, of our physical constitution? We are launched on the stream at our birth. Some of us can swim against the current. Those who can't it washes away.

[*There is a pause.* HENRY *looks sullen,* MR JACKSON *puzzled.* EUSTACE, *who has grown rather heated, regains his composure.*

MR JACKSON. Well, what's to be done with you?

EUSTACE. I'm afraid you'll have to keep me. You're my father, you know. You've brought into the world a worthless and useless human being. I think those were *your* adjectives? You're responsible.

MR JACKSON. Is that any reason why I should support you?

EUSTACE. No, Father. Frankly I don't think it is. I think your sensible course would be to put me quietly out of this wicked world or hire some one else to do so. I'm a bad egg. I shall never hatch into anything that will do you the smallest credit. Your sensible course is to destroy me. But you daren't do that. Social convention won't allow you; the law would make a fuss. Indeed, the law won't even allow me to put an end to myself and save you the trouble. I should be rescued, very wet and draggled, from the muddy waters of the Ched by the solitary policeman, who seems to have nothing else to do but to stand about rescuing people who had much better be left to drown. I should be haled before the magistrate—you're a magistrate yourself now, Father. You'd be there—I should be given a solemn lecture and then "handed over to my friends"—that's you again, Father—who would undertake to look after me in future. And I only hope you would be able to conceal your annoyance at my rescue from the prying eyes of your brother justices!

MR JACKSON. You've no right to say that. You've no right to suggest that I wish you were dead.

EUSTACE [*genially*]. Of course you do. You want me to go to Australia where you'll never hear of me again, where in fact I shall be dead to you. What's the difference? [*Pause.*

MR JACKSON. Well, I won't argue with you. The question is, what do you propose?

EUSTACE [*after a moment's thought*]. In the circumstances, I think your wisest course will be to make me an allowance, say three hundred a year, paid quarterly. Then I'll go away and live quietly in London, and you'll be rid of me.

MR JACKSON [*angry again*]. I refuse, sir, I refuse absolutely. The suggestion is utterly shameless.

EUSTACE. I dare say. But it's perfectly sensible. I appeal to Henry.

HENRY. Father, I think you'd better do as he says. If you gave him a thousand pounds as we intended, he'd only lose it. Better make him an allowance. Then you can always stop it if he doesn't behave himself. It's a shameless proposal, as you say, but it's practical.

EUSTACE. Bravo, Henry, I always said you had brains. That's exactly it. Shameless, but eminently practical.

MR JACKSON [*grumbling*]. What I can't see is why I should allow you this money. [HENRY *turns away annoyed and sits.*] Here's Henry, who's perfectly satisfactory, and has never caused me a moment's anxiety. I don't give *him* money. Whereas you who have never caused me anything else expect me to keep you for the remainder of your life.

EUSTACE. It is unreasonable, isn't it? But we live in a humanitarian age. We coddle the sick and we keep alive the imbecile. We shall soon come to pensioning the idle and the dissolute. You're only a little in advance of the times. England is covered with hospitals for the incurably diseased and asylums for the incurably mad. If a tenth of the money were spent on putting such people out of the world and the rest were used in preventing the healthy people from falling sick, and the sane people from starving, we should be a wholesomer nation.

MR JACKSON [*after a pause*]. Well, if Henry thinks so I suppose I must give you an allowance. But I won't go beyond two hundred.

EUSTACE. I can't keep out of debt on two hundred.

MR JACKSON. Two hundred and fifty, then.

EUSTACE [*persuasively*]. Three hundred.

MR JACKSON. Two hundred and fifty. Not a penny more. [*Breaking out again*] Why, I'd starve before I consented to sponge on my family as you are doing.

EUSTACE [*quietly*]. Ah! you evidently don't know much about starving, Father! If you write a cheque for my first quarter now I can catch the eleven-fifteen up.

MR JACKSON. You can't go to-night. You're not packed. And you'll want to say good-bye to your mother.

EUSTACE. I think not. As I'm to go, it had better be as suddenly as I came. It saves such a lot of explanations. You can send my things after me to London.

MR JACKSON. Very well. I'll go and write you a cheque. [*Exit.*

[*A long pause.*

HENRY [*bitterly*]. Well, you've got what you wanted.

EUSTACE [*airily*]. Thanks to you, my dear fellow.

HENRY. What a sordid plot it has been! To make your way into this house by a trick with the deliberate intention of blackmailing your own father.

EUSTACE. You're wrong. The blackmail, as you call it, was an afterthought. When I made my way into this house in the way you so accurately describe my designs went no further than getting some decent food and a house over my head for a few days. But when I got here and found you all so infernally prosperous, the Governor flinging money about over getting into Parliament, you intending to marry Faringford's daughter, I thought I'd put in for a share of the plunder.

HENRY [*disgusted*]. Well, you've succeeded, succeeded because you've neither honour nor conscience about you.

EUSTACE. No. I've succeeded because you're a snob and the Governor's a snob, and that put you both in my power. I might have been as poor and as unscrupulous as you please without getting a halfpenny out of either of you. Luckily the Governor's political ambitions and your social ambitions gave me the pull over you, and I used it.

HENRY [*rises and goes towards* EUSTACE]. Faugh! [*Fiercely*] You understand, of course, that if you are to have this allowance it is on the express condition that you give up all thoughts of Miss Faringford, give them up absolutely?

EUSTACE. By all means. What should *I* be about, marrying a penniless girl like Stella?

HENRY. There's nothing you won't do for money! Even to giving up the girl you pretend to care for.

EUSTACE [*shrugs*]. I dare say. Besides, what would Stella be about —marrying a penniless devil like me? [*Another silence.*

HENRY [*breaking out*]. And the best of it is, if this story ever gets about *you'll* get all the sympathy! Ne-er-do-wells always do. The Governor and I would be despised as a couple of stony-hearted wretches with no bowels of compassion, who grudged money to a necessitous brother, while you would be called a light-hearted devil-may-care chap who is nobody's enemy but his own!

EUSTACE. Well, I think I'd change places with you. After all, you're pretty comfortable here. And you'll marry Stella, damn you.

[HENRY *is silent. Pause.*

[*Enter* MR JACKSON *with cheque in his hand.*

MR JACKSON. Here's your cheque.

EUSTACE [*looks at it*]. Fours into two hundred and fifty. Sixty-two pounds ten. Thanks, Father. [*Holds out hand.*] Good-bye. [MR JACKSON *hesitates.*] You may as well. After all, I'm your son. And if I'm a sweep it's your fault!

MR JACKSON [*takes his hand*]. Good-bye. [*Hesitates—moves to fireplace.* EUSTACE *turns to go.*] You may write occasionally, just to let us know how you are.

EUSTACE [*smiles grimly. Then hands back cheque*]. Make it three hundred, Father—and I won't write. [MR JACKSON *is about to protest angrily, then, recognizing the uselessness of that proceeding, says nothing, but waves cheque contemptuously away.* EUSTACE, *still smiling, pockets it.*] No? Well, have it your own way. Good-bye. Good-bye, Henry.

[*Nods to him without offering to shake hands.*

[*Exit.* MR JACKSON *turns toward fireplace and leans head on mantelpiece with a sigh.*

# THE NEW MORALITY

## By HAROLD CHAPIN

*First produced at the Comedy Theatre, London, November 29, 1920*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

Colonel Ivor Jones
Betty Jones, *his wife*
Geoffrey Belasis, K.C., *her brother*
Alice Meyne, *her friend*
E. Wallace Wister, *a neighbour*
Wooton, *manservant*
Lesceline, *maid*

*The action of the play takes place on the Jones's houseboat, the "Hyacinth," the Wisters' boat, the "Merry Mischief," being near by.*

*The time occupied is from 4.30 to 8 o'clock on an evening in a record summer.*

ALTHOUGH the late Harold Chapin was technically an American citizen, he was an English actor, an English playwright, and died as a British soldier. *The New Morality* is exquisite comedy, and his *Art and Opportunity* is hardly less striking; but—as is so frequently the fate of the dramatist whose fame rests principally upon one-act plays—the theatre of Harold Chapin has never received the attention which it deserves. *The Dumb and the Blind* is an almost perfect one-act play, depicting with tender poignancy the sufferings of the inarticulate poor, and there is savage irony in *It's the Poor that 'Elps the Poor.* Chapin's talent for dialogue and characterization is remarkably fine: he has the sure touch of a master, and a sympathy which is irresistible.

In *The New Morality*, however, the author has experimented with a different social class, and wrote as if he were maliciously happy. His low-life characters (in the one-act plays) moved him to intense pity, but the comfortable middle classes in their houseboats provoke him to laughter, and his humour is faintly flavoured with cynicism. The subject is one which would have appealed to St John Hankin, but

many other playwrights would have been driven to fury by what is, after all, a comic situation, not altogether unfamiliar to suburban life.

All good drama is built upon a sound psychological foundation, and its success in action, in characterization, and even in dialogue depends upon the author's instinctive knowledge of elemental facts. The propagandist within the playwright is apt to grow hot with resentment against human nature, but the artist within him remains dispassionate, or possibly amused, and compels him to set down the truth as he sees it. One can only regret that a man of Chapin's rare genius should have died so young.

# ACT I

SCENE: BETTY'S *bedroom on the "Hyacinth."*

*A low, rectangular room: its chief furnishing a large chintz-hung bed. Three small, square, chintz-curtained windows break the far wall into equal panels of flowery wallpaper. The door is up right. Below it is a white enamelled wardrobe. The bed's head is to the wall left, the configuration of which (it projects between two alcoves) places that article of furniture almost in the centre of the room, and in a very visible position.*

*Below the bed against the wall (half in the alcove) is a table supporting a few books, papers, hairbrushes, fruit, a vase of flowers, smelling-salts, and a jug of lemonade—iced and tinkly—and glasses. There are, of course, other things on this bedside table—such as a patience pack, a fountain-pen, and some photographs in frames—but I need not enumerate them—unless, perhaps, I mention the tin of Brand's essence—open on a plate, with a spoon in it.*

*There is a chintz-covered couch along the foot of the bed; a dressing-table up at the middle window; the bed curtains probably hide a chest of drawers in the far alcove above the bed-head. Only two chairs are in the room, one against the wall below the wardrobe, and one up at the dressing-table.*

*It will be seen that there is not much space in the room—or cabin. A depth of six feet below the bed, something less above it, and a channel four feet wide between the couch at the foot of the bed and the wardrobe.*

*In the bed is* MRS BETTY JONES. *Her back is to us, but we feel sure that nobody but herself could wear such a very modish marvel of a lace boudoir-cap or such a dream of a lace bed-jacket.*

*The room is delightfully shady and cool, though the sun is blazing upon the tree-clad bank beyond the windows and on the river below them; from which last its ripple-swayed reflections dance upon the ceiling.*

*The lady in the bed turns over with a sigh of irritation and faces us. Yes, it is* MRS BETTY, *as we suspected from her attire. Her expression is not her usual one, though. Her eyes—which are wide open as she turns—are bright and hard, and it is obvious that the word which she frames with her lips is designed to congrue. She shuts her mouth*

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*firmly, however, without speaking, and, closing her eyes with disciplinary tightness, sets herself to sleep with great severity and determination.*

*There is a knock at the door, and* LESCELINE—*the maid—enters. She comes to foot of bed and awaits a signal to discover her errand.* BETTY *gives it without opening her eyes.*

BETTY [*in a discouraging—not to say warning—voice*]. Well?

LESCELINE. Miss Meyne, ma'am.

BETTY [*opening her eyes incredulously*]. What?

LESCELINE [*repeating the information*]. Miss Meyne, ma'am.

[BETTY *ponders, her lips parted in hopes of finding words in which one may ask of a servant such questions as: "What has she come for?"*

[*Respectfully, after a pause*] You did expect her to tea, ma'am.

BETTY [*half to herself*]. I know, I . . . [*With sudden determination*] Ask her if she'd mind coming down here.

[LESCELINE *exits obediently.* BETTY *resumes her attack upon slumber.* LESCELINE *returns, showing in* ALICE MEYNE, *a tall, very English girl, or, rather, young woman—she is twenty-six or -seven—of the pleasant and homely type. She is well, but not very smartly, dressed in summer white. There is something healthily ordinary about her—a dependable, restful obviousness and simplicity—that endears her immensely to the highly strung and intensely mental and complex* BETTY. *She comes below the bed to kiss her friend, who greets her drily with:*

BETTY. Bless you, my dear. You would be the one soul on the river not to hear about it.

[*They exchange the formal kiss of feminine greeting, and* ALICE *stands erect again, looking down at* BETTY, *who still holds her by the hand and studies her quizzingly.*

BETTY. You're a marvel! How in the world did you manage not to?

ALICE. Not to what?

BETTY. Not to hear about my row with Muriel Wister.

ALICE. Oh, I [*very slightly embarrassed*]—I didn't manage not to.

BETTY [*surprised*]. You *have* heard about it?

ALICE. Well, I [*her embarrassment is a shade deeper, perhaps*]—I heard it.

BETTY [*horrified*]. You . . . [*She is dumb for a moment, staring at her friend; then she disappears amongst the bedclothes, dragging them up to her ears and turning her back to her friend in some real and much simulated confusion.*] Oh, my dear! Go away! Go away! I'm not going to . . . [*Suddenly emerging*] You heard it all?

ALICE [*sedately*]. I heard from before it began until—after it stopped, I think. [*In mitigation*] You see—I was only a—few yards away.

BETTY [*surprised and wondering*]. Only a . . . Where?

ALICE. Just across the river.

BETTY. *Just* across the river? Oh, my conscience! [*Drily*] You weren't just above the lock as well, by any chance?

ALICE. No, no [*more and more lamely*]—just—on the opposite bank.

BETTY. Was there anybody else there?

ALICE. No—er—Mother was with me.

BETTY. I'm glad. Anyone else?

ALICE. Not when it started. They—came up.

BETTY [*with keen appreciation*]. I bet they did—from far and near. [*Risking the question after a scarcely perceptible pause*] Could you—distinguish *words*?

ALICE. Some.

BETTY. *Mine* mostly.

ALICE. I don't think I heard her speak.

BETTY. She didn't. Her husband asked me to please go away once or twice, but I don't think he spoke up. [*After a second, in a tone that betrays the fact that she appreciates the seriousness of her behaviour, though her eyes still twinkle with the humour of it*] You heard me call her a——? [ALICE *nods.*

[*Explosively*] Then, my dear child, what on *earth* are you doing here?

ALICE [*smiling*]. Well, you asked me to tea.

BETTY. Pretty bairn! [*She suddenly sits up and rings the bell hanging above her head.*] You may as well have a cup now you've come for it. Your character's gone, anyway.

[*She switches on electric light at bed's head and sits up against pillows.*

ALICE [*laughing sedately*]. Oh, I hope not!

BETTY. It isn't a case for hope. It's a case for despair!

[LESCELINE *knocks and enters.*

BETTY. Tea, Lesceline. [LESCELINE *exits.*

BETTY [*continuing*]. If I'd murdered Muriel with a boathook, or something original like that, every one would have praised you for coming to see me, but really—calling and insulting her before breakfast.

ALICE. Don't be silly.

BETTY. Your mother'd never have let you come.

ALICE [*gently triumphing*]. As it happens, I asked Mother whether I should or not.

BETTY [*incredulously*]. And she said yes?

ALICE. She said that if I didn't tire you, she thought you'd be glad to see me.

BETTY. My dear, are you quite a fool, or are you just pretending?

Don't you realize that I've no right to expect my decent friends to so much as recognize me? Did you or did you not hear me call that women a——?

ALICE [*quietly*]. Well, she is . . .

BETTY [*explosively*]. I *know* she is! But you can't go calling people dog-show names on the deck of their own houseboat in a voice loud enough to be heard across the river.

ALICE [*mildly reproving her friend*]. I wasn't going to say that. I was going to say—well, she is very trying, I know.

BETTY. Well, if that's going to be the official name for trying people . . . [*Bursting out emphatically*] No, it's no use, my dear! I've done for myself, and I know it. I shan't blame people a bit for cutting me. I deserve to be cut. I went on like a—fishwife. And it wasn't only the names I called her. I said things—whole—subject—predicate, and —extras. You know. You heard me.

ALICE [*blushfully*]. Yes, I heard you say several things. But it was only in the heat of the moment. You had a brain-storm.

BETTY. Bless the child! It sounds so much better with a label, doesn't it? [*Bursting out again*] No . . . [*She checks herself abruptly as* LESCELINE *enters with the tea.* BETTY *watches her in silence as she brings it, with a little table, to below bed. Then suddenly she bursts out again.*] I don't know why I stop for Lesceline. *You* know all about it, *don't* you, Lesceline?

LESCELINE [*respectfully*]. Oh, yes, madam.

BETTY. In fact, you heard it too, I suppose? It was only on the next houseboat. Miss Meyne heard it all excellently from the other side of the river.

LESCELINE [*civilly*]. We have had to boil the milk, ma'am. Mister Wooton is very sorry. This morning's went sour almost immediately.

[*She goes out.* BETTY *watches her off with a comic expression, which she translates into words as soon as the door has closed.*

BETTY. Did she mean that for cheek?

ALICE. What?

BETTY. About boiling the milk, and this morning's going sour?

ALICE [*laughing*]. Don't be ridiculous. It's frightfully hot; everybody's having to boil their milk. We can't keep anything on shore, with a decent larder. How in the world you manage, I don't know.

BETTY [*leaning uncomfortably out of bed towards the tea-tray*]. I don't manage—I pray.

ALICE [*laughing*]. Does it do any good?

BETTY. Not now that the ice has stopped coming.

ALICE [*concerned*]. Can't you get any?

BETTY. Not unless I go myself and plead for it.

ALICE. Oh, we still get ours from Tinney's. Of course, he doesn't give us anything like such a big sixpennyworth as he used to, though we pay ninepence for it and . . .

BETTY [*giving up the struggle with the distant tea-things*]. I wish to goodness you'd stop boasting about your beastly ice and pour out my tea for me.

ALICE [*contritely, hastening to obey*]. I'm so sorry. You do take sugar, don't you?

BETTY. I'll take anything that's nourishing. [*She leans back against pillows, taking with her a cress sandwich.*] My word, I'm hungry! I sent away my lunch without tasting it, and I was starving.

ALICE [*busy pouring out*]. Why did you send it away, then?

BETTY. Oh, my dear, you must send away the next meal after a scene; it's part of the ritual of the thing. It's no excuse, I suppose, but it's doing the thing properly, and that's *something*.

ALICE [*matter-of-factly, as she hands her her tea*]. You know, you oughtn't to talk such a lot, you still look queer.

BETTY [*candidly*]. I feel as weak as a rat. [*Taking another sandwich from* ALICE] Thanks. You know, it's hard work expressing yourself as copiously as I did. I came home and went to bed after it.

ALICE [*moved to pity by the other's brightness*]. Poor dear, you've been having a bad time of it.

BETTY [*with a trace of resentment*]. Yes. And everybody on the river knows it, don't they? That's so soothing.

ALICE. Oh, I don't think everybody knows it, but your friends, at least, will be able to make allowances. Mother was saying this morning that you'd had enough to make a saint swear.

BETTY. What a saint I must be! Oh, my dear, it's not a bit of use. I've done it, and I don't want people to make allowances for me. [*Wavering slightly*] I'm glad you and your mother—but then you're so hopelessly good that behaviour like mine was only a phenomenon to you. You can't imagine yourself going on the way I did, can you?

ALICE. You never know.

BETTY. Don't exult in your possibilities in that shameless way. You know you can't. If you could imagine yourself making a scene you'd realize that you mustn't countenance mine.

ALICE. It ought to be the other way about.

BETTY. Yes. That's why it isn't. You can go on making allowance for me if you like, Alice—though I don't say I wouldn't rather be independent of them even from you. As for the rest of the river—I don't want them to. I believe it was knowing that they were all busy pitying me already that put the roof on things. I've absolutely done it once and for all. They'll appreciate that I had been sorely tried, and give me the cut regretful. If they took Muriel's part and declared

open war it wouldn't be half so bad. Oh, I knew before I'd got half-way through my little—but the second half didn't exactly flag, did it? I suppose I'd got to use up all the names. [*Seriously*] Isn't it perfectly astonishing what a lot I knew, too? [*They both laugh.*

BETTY. I suppose you've never been inspired, Alice?

ALICE. I don't think so.

BETTY. It's a curious feeling—rather nice; settled and free—from—hesitancy. I woke up with it.

ALICE. Had anything happened?

BETTY. No, nothing at all. Nothing fresh, that is. [*Cogitating*] It is curious, isn't it? I've been giving Ivor hell for a week.

ALICE. Betty!

BETTY [*mocking her*]. Alice!

ALICE [*realizing that her remonstrances will be ridiculed and dropping them*]. No—I was just . . .

BETTY [*nodding*]. I know. "Why go for the poor *man* when the *woman* lives just next door?" I suppose I must be fond of Ivor.

ALICE [*meditating*]. What . . . [*She stops.*

BETTY. Well?

ALICE. I—it's being impertinent, I'm afraid.

BETTY. Well, you must make a start some day. Out with it!

ALICE. I was hoping Colonel Jones might have been able to explain.

BETTY [*mystified*]. Explain? When?

ALICE. When you had it out with him.

BETTY. My dear, I haven't had it out with him.

ALICE. You said you'd been giving him hell . . .

BETTY. Yes, but you don't imagine I told him why?

ALICE [*surprised*]. Didn't you?

BETTY [*shocked*]. Tell a man what you're giving him hell for? Why, he'd forgive himself in two minutes and crawl out.

ALICE [*reproachfully*]. You're rather too cruel.

BETTY [*with a touch of hardness*]. What? To Ivor?

ALICE [*feebly*]. Well . . .

BETTY [*a challenge*]. Don't you think he deserves it?

ALICE. Not to be made miserable for a whole week without knowing what for.

BETTY [*cornering her*]. You think he could have borne it better if he'd known?

ALICE. Well—he might have been able to explain—or he might have admitted that he'd not behaved quite . . .

BETTY [*scoring*]. Just what I said! Forgive himself freely and crawl out. He might even forgive me for having brought up the subject if I were very sweet and womanly about it.

ALICE [*tenaciously*]. But he must think you fearfully unjust.

BETTY. A man always thinks you're fearfully unjust if you're not patting him on the head.

ALICE [*seriously shocked*]. But don't you mind being thought unjust?

BETTY [*decidedly*]. I prefer it to being thought a fool, or having Ivor thought a fool.

ALICE [*roused*]. Who thinks him a fool?

BETTY. Good Lord, *I* do!

ALICE [*thoughtfully, after a pause*]. I'm a little sorry for Colonel Jones.

BETTY. Oh, my dear, you're sweet on him yourself.

ALICE [*with spirit*]. Betty, I won't have you saying things like that. They aren't funny, and they aren't nice, and I won't allow them even from you.

BETTY [*contrite, but mocking*]. Pardon! I ought to be more careful. But, you see, you're the only lady of my acquaintance who has to be treated like one, and I forget.

ALICE [*uncomfortably*]. Betty—please!

BETTY. Bless your pretty mind—I like you for it! I believe I admire your good qualities almost as much as you admire my bad ones.

ALICE. Your bad ones aren't so very bad.

BETTY. Well, and your good ones aren't so amazingly good, so we're about quits. Here—give me some more tea.

[ALICE *obeys in silence for a moment, during which* BETTY *follows a train of thought which culminates in a peal of hearty laughter.*

BETTY [*still laughing*]. Really, he *is* rather pathetic!

ALICE. Who?

BETTY. Ivor. I'm quite beginning to pity him myself—chuchuing up and down the river in that smelly little motor-canoe of his, and coming back with a sheaf of lock-tickets as a sort of alibi every evening. That's what he's been doing since I started on him.

ALICE. Oh, then he does guess what you're angry about?

BETTY. No. I think he's just been isolating himself by—instinct. Marvellous instincts men . . . [*Lifting her head to listen*] Listen!

ALICE. What?

BETTY [*after a second*]. I thought [*another second*]—no. What was I saying?

ALICE. You were saying that men . . .

BETTY [*who has not dropped her listening attitude, suddenly*]. Yes, it is!

ALICE. Who?

BETTY. The Brute. He's just . . .

ALICE. Betty, do not call him that. He isn't a brute, anyway.

BETTY. No, I know he isn't. That's why it's so gratifying to call

him one. Shsh! [*Closing her eyes, she flops over on to her side, where, without opening them, she indulges in a little nervous chuckle.*] He's come back in a hurry.

[*There is a second's silence, then* COLONEL JONES *enters quite normally, though he is grave and obviously anxious. He is a big, broad, soldierly-looking man with a close-trimmed moustache and short, dark hair very slightly grizzled. He looks his forty-eight years, it is true, but they have been years of healthy, open-air soldiering—not of clubs and shopping.*

JONES [*coming down between the wardrobe and the bed to* ALICE's *right*]. Hullo, Alice, they told me you were having tea down here. [*He throws a swift glance at* BETTY, *whose eyes are still tight shut.*] May I have a cup?

ALICE [*peering into the teapot*]. It's not very . . .

BETTY [*her eyes still firmly shut*]. Who fetched you?

JONES [*quietly, but unable to keep the gravity out of his voice*]. Nicolai—advised me to turn back. I met him—he was going over the bridge at Sonning in his car. [*Taking cup*] Thanks.

BETTY. Did he tell you why?

JONES. No, he—just hinted that something had happened.

BETTY [*opening her eyes appreciatively, to* ALICE]. Ha! ha! Can't you see him doing it? I can! Dear, noble soul! I love men when they're sympathizing over each other's wives—they're so—so—understanding and—mutual—about it; so discreet! I believe men are the noblest creatures God ever made—the cowards!

ALICE [*amazed and amused, but reproving*]. Betty!

BETTY. Well, it is nothing but funk. Wasn't Nicolai in a blue funk for fear he'd say too much, Ivor?

JONES [*smiling in spite of himself*]. He certainly was rather guarded.

BETTY [*with that delicate spite which she reserves for her fallen husband*]. Weren't you frightened?

JONES [*simply*]. I was. I am thankful to find things no worse.

BETTY [*resenting this*]. What do you mean by no worse?

JONES. Well—you are alive . . .

BETTY. That must be a great relief to you.

JONES. And in full enjoyment of your usual good spirits.

ALICE [*rising decidedly*]. I must go.

BETTY. No, Alice, don't . . .

ALICE. I really must. [*She glances at* IVOR.

BETTY. Ivor only wants to hear about this morning, and you might help me to remember some of the things I said.

ALICE [*reprovingly*]. Don't be silly. Good-bye.

[*She holds out her hand.*

BETTY [*taking the hand and retaining* ALICE *by it while she talks to* IVOR]. Alice heard it all from the towing-path, Ivor, so you see how serious it is.

JONES. I might, if I knew what it was she heard.

BETTY. Oh, anybody on the river'll tell you. Just run up on deck and call over the side.

JONES [*quietly*]. I would rather you told me, I think.

ALICE [*pulling gently at the detaining hand*]. Please, Betty!

BETTY [*quite containedly to her*]. Wait a minute, dear. [*To* IVOR] I told Muriel Wister what I thought of her—rather loud—that's all.

JONES [*with the simple acceptance of a calamity which goes with a full appreciation of it*]. Yes.

ALICE [*almost frightened*]. Betty, I must go. [*Sotto voce as* JONES *goes up to the door and opens it for her*] You're behaving like a little beast. Don't.

BETTY. Why not?

ALICE. It doesn't suit you.

BETTY. It does. Look how well I do it.

ALICE. Rubbish. It's just bravado.

BETTY [*amazed at her friend's daring—and perhaps at her insight*]. Alice!

ALICE [*giving a further proof of the latter quality by suddenly kissing the unrepentant one tenderly*]. Good-bye, dear. I'm so sorry for what's happened.

BETTY [*touched, but mocking to the last*]. I'm sure you are. Good-bye.

[ALICE *goes to door, where she shakes hands with* JONES.

ALICE. Good-bye.

JONES. Good-bye. Thank you very much for coming over.

ALICE. Oh, I [*suddenly*]—I suppose you won't be going down to the lawns after dinner now?

JONES [*reminded of an appointment*]. Oh, no—I suppose we shan't. We were going to take you there, weren't we?

ALICE. Yes . . .

JONES. I wonder if you'd mind coming here instead? Come to dinner if you will . . .

ALICE. I will, of course . . .

JONES. Thank you so much. Good-bye.

[ALICE *exits.* JONES *closes the door after her and turns towards his wife.*

BETTY [*watching him as he comes down*]. I'm glad you're grateful to my friend for coming to see me.

JONES. I am.

BETTY. I'll tell her. She'd do more than that to please you.

JONES. Don't be silly, Betty. I think we ought to be a little grateful

to Alice for calling on us if the scene this morning was as bad as you make out.

BETTY [*her eyebrows raised*]. As *I* make out?

JONES. Didn't you mean to impress me with its seriousness?

[*There is a pause.* BETTY *is momentarily floored.* JONES *sits on chair below foot of bed. At last his thoughts drive him to utterance.*

[*With more vehemence than he has yet shown*] What was she doing here, anyway?

BETTY. Alice?

JONES. No, no, no—Muriel. Mrs Wister. Did she just drop in in the ordinary way? . . .

BETTY. No. Oh, no. I—er—dropped in on her.

JONES [*surprised*]. You went over to the Wisters' boat? But I thought you hated Muriel now?

BETTY. I do. I just—called and told her so.

JONES. What? Unprovoked?

BETTY [*sharply*]. Un-what?

JONES. Un . . . Out of sheer—I mean: didn't she do anything at all to——

BETTY [*furiously*]. Didn't she do anything at all? No. She—she doesn't seem to have to do anything at all. She's one of those lucky people who find things come to them without. She sat still and grinned while I swore at her, just as beautifully as she has been sitting and grinning all the summer while you danced attendance on her. Oh!

JONES [*a great light breaking in upon him*]. Betty! Is that what has been—wrong? You don't mean to tell me you've been jealous of Muriel Wister!

BETTY [*very decidedly*]. No, I don't.

JONES [*ignoring her denial*]. But it's unbelievable!

BETTY. I'm very glad you think so.

JONES. Why didn't you tell me that you were?

BETTY. I'm telling you now that I'm not.

JONES. I——

BETTY. Don't go on like that. [*He stops.*] I'm not jealous of her. You're insulting me by suggesting such a thing. I couldn't be jealous of Muriel Wister if I tried.

JONES. Then what is the matter?

BETTY [*cruelly*]. It is a mystery, isn't it?

JONES [*frankly*]. It is to me. [*After a second's dumbness he breaks out again.*] I . . . You can't *imagine* me making love to Muriel Wister?

BETTY. I can't. I wish I could. It would amuse me awfully.

[*There is another lapse into silence.* IVOR *sits dumb and miser-*

*able. At last he shakes off the dejection upon him and rises with a flash of angry resentment against his treatment.*

JONES. Oh, well [*putting his chair back*]—I suppose we've just got to add this to the list of a few other little pleasantries of yours which . . .

[*He is moving up to the door—is at it by this time—but his imminent departure appears to throw* BETTY *into a cold fury, to which she sacrifices her more playful—and more cruel—method of revenging herself upon him.*

BETTY. Ivor! [*He turns at the steel in her voice.*] Come back here.

[*He comes obediently to the foot of the bed.*

BETTY [*tensely*]. Are you really such a fool that you can't see what you've done?

JONES [*respecting her anger*]. I'm afraid I must be.

BETTY. Can't you imagine that to see you made a fool of before the whole river may possibly hurt me even more than it would to be jealous of Muriel Wister?

JONES. How—made a fool of?

BETTY. How? Oh, Ivor, if you've no sense of humour to tell you when you're making a laughing-stock of yourself, you might use your eyes for my sake.

JONES. I do—I—I haven't seen anybody laughing . . .

BETTY [*despairingly*]. Oh, my God!

JONES [*genuinely grieved*]. Betty, believe me, I don't know what I've done even now. I'm sorry . . . I can see that you—but I seem to have been behaving much as usual lately—this last week, since you—showed so plainly that something was displeasing you. I have been watching my behaviour like a—lynx. I really can't see what I've done out of the common. I've been miserable enough this past week, goodness knows, but I don't see how that . . .

[*He gives up in pathetic despair.*

BETTY. Poor fellow. I lead you an awful life, don't I?

JONES [*sincerely*]. Really, I think you do.

BETTY. And you don't deserve it, do you? You're a pattern husband, aren't you? Everything that a wife could wish for. That's why you've not been near Muriel Wister since you've opened this lynx-like eye on your behaviour.

JONES [*with some dignity*]. I've not been going to see her because I thought that—since nothing I was doing really justified your—annoyance with me—it must be that you were placing a misconstruction upon some perfectly innocent—relationship—and . . .

BETTY. My dear Ivor, I never miscontrued your relations in the very least. When you bobbed up and down on your chair and fidgeted with your watch all through tea because you'd got to fetch her a packet

of hairpins from the town and you dreaded finding the shop shut, I never feared it was illicit passion that made you so anxious, and even when she made you sing idiotic duets with her, I never doubted your innocence or hers.

JONES. Then if you didn't, why should you be so certain that other people would?

BETTY [*slightly puzzled*]. I wasn't certain other people would . . . [*Suddenly*] Oh, I see what you mean. My dear Ivor, nobody on the Thames has doubted your beautiful innocence. They've mentioned it twenty times a day. Do you know what they've said?

JONES. What?

BETTY. They've said: "It's wonderful how that woman keeps men dangling about after her, because—she's *perfectly straight*, you know!"

JONES. Well, so she is!

BETTY. My dear, I believe it. It's the first thing you notice when you meet her.

JONES [*really angry*]. You're disgusting! Absolutely disgusting! I believe you'd rather she wasn't.

BETTY [*quizzically*]. That would shock you, wouldn't it?

JONES. Upon my word, it wouldn't surprise me!

BETTY [*with just a touch of regret in the question*]. Anyway, not so much as it surprises you to find that I don't like seeing you look a fool.

JONES. I deny that I look a fool.

BETTY. Oh, my dear, if you are reduced to denying that you look a fool . . .

JONES [*angrily*]. Well, I am reduced to denying it. And I do deny it! I fail to see that a purely pl—p—— honourable friendship . . .

BETTY [*twinkling*]. Do you usually spell "honourable" with a [*mocking him*] "pl—p——"?

JONES [*savagely*]. Oh, you are very funny!

BETTY. Well, I am relieved that you couldn't say it. It shows that you have some sense of humour, even if you don't act up to it.

JONES. I could say it—only I thought that you wouldn't understand. [*Determinedly*] I suppose you don't believe in platonic friendship?

BETTY [*shaking her head at him reprovingly*]. It's no good trying to bluff me, Ivor. There's no sort of friendship between you and Muriel. She's simply run you down, and cornered you, and you are trying to make the best of it by calling the affair romantic names. Oh, I've seen lots of these platonic friendships. You can always recognize them quite easily; the man thinks he's a hero and looks like a fool, and the woman goes about with that damn-conceited look of having got something for nothing.

JONES [*furiously*]. Betty, I will not stay and listen to you saying such things.

BETTY [*suddenly weary of the struggle*]. Then go away. I've said all I wanted to. You don't understand what you've done. I was much wiser not to tell you. You don't understand, you've no . . . [*Stops.*

JONES. No what?

BETTY. Oh, I don't know what you call it.

JONES. I haven't your capacity for cynical immoralism, if that is what you mean.

BETTY. That's funny. I was going to say you had no real morality, but I stopped because I knew you'd be muddled.

JONES. A queer sort of morality you've got, if it condemns a perfectly innocent friendship——

BETTY. Don't bluster every time you say friendship, dear.

JONES [*repeating it firmly*]. Perfectly innocent friendship——

BETTY. There you go again. You'll never convince either me or yourself by just repeating it. Be honest. Say, if my morals condemn Muriel Wister adding you to her staff of servants—what then?

JONES. I was going to say "and condone a public scene."

BETTY [*quietly*]. I see. I don't think they condone a public scene, Ivor.

JONES. Well, you appear to have made one.

BETTY. Yes, I do appear to have, don't I? I'm not exactly proud of having done it, though.

JONES. Then why did you?

BETTY. Oh, my patience! [*There is a knock at the door. They exchange a glance.*] Come in. [LESCELINE *enters with a note.*

LESCELINE [*taking it to* JONES]. Mr Wister, sir.

JONES [*taking it*]. Thanks. [*Opens it.*

BETTY [*prepared for battle*]. From Muriel?

JONES. No, no—Wister. [*To* LESCELINE] You needn't wait. [*Turns page.*] Mr Wister is upstairs?

LESCELINE. Yes, sir.

JONES. 'Um!

[LESCELINE *exits.* JONES *hands the note to* BETTY, *who starts reading it. Suddenly she looks up.*

BETTY. I certainly will not apologize!

JONES. My dear Betty . . .

BETTY. I suppose *you'd* like me to?

JONES. You say you're not defending the scene you made . . .

BETTY. I don't know. It did me a lot of good.

JONES. Well, the good having been done . . .

BETTY [*incredulously*]. You'd have me apologize to Muriel Wister?

JONES. If you've insulted her.

BETTY. If I've insulted her I'm glad of it.

JONES. My dear, you were saying just now . . .

BETTY [*unable to contain herself*]. The impertinence of the woman! First, she makes you look a fool, then she makes me lose my temper, then she has the impertinence to ask for an apology.

JONES. Betty, dear, you are in the wrong.

BETTY. I am not in the wrong. I forgot myself and overdid things, but [*resolutely*]—I was not in the wrong.

JONES. Won't you apologize for what you said when you forgot yourself?

BETTY [*perversely*]. Why should I?

JONES [*evading discussion*]. Don't you think it would be politic? I do.

BETTY. A man always thinks the most politic thing he can do is to humiliate his wife.

JONES. Don't be so unjust. Do you think I want you to be humiliated?

BETTY. Don't you?

JONES. You know I don't.

BETTY. All right. Go upstairs and throw that idiot over the side. . . .

JONES. I give you up entirely! Really, I begin to have fears for your sanity when you talk so wildly.

BETTY. You . . . [*There is another knock at the door. They are silent. The knock is repeated.*] Oh, come in! [*Enter* LESCELINE.

LESCELINE. Mr Wister says he will call back later, sir, if you would rather.

JONES. No, no. I'll see him now. Ask him to wait, please.

[*Exit* LESCELINE.

BETTY. Ivor, you are not to go up. I know perfectly well what you are going to say to him.

JONES. Do you? That's more than I do.

BETTY. You're going to say that I am quite beyond reasoning with at present, but . . .

JONES [*going*]. That certainly is a suggestion.

BETTY. Ivor, you're not to go!

JONES. Betty . . .

BETTY. Well, if you promise to get an apology out of me . . .

JONES. I shall make no promise about you, Betty. I shall not say that you are beyond reasoning with *at present*. I shall . . .

BETTY. Wait. I insist upon being present—I insist upon hearing what you say to him . . .

[JONES *goes out.* BETTY *immediately rings the bell and keeps on ringing.* LESCELINE *answers it.*

BETTY [*throwing back the sheets*]. Clothes, Lesceline!

# ACT II

SCENE: *The deck of the "Hyacinth."*

*The boat is moored close under the bank, so that the trees make the awning which renders some houseboats so stuffy and tent-like unnecessary; it is merely stretched across one end of the deck—and not right across that—its shadow falling over a little less than half of the stage. In the shadow—nearly centre—are a wicker, tile-topped table and three chairs, a fourth chair being remote from them down right. The deck is reached by the usual staircases: one at the upper right-hand corner leads down to the landing 'front door' end of the boat; the other—down left—to the tender and servants' quarters. The railing which runs around the deck is white enamelled. At its base are long boxes of marguerites and geraniums running all around, except, of course, where the stairs are.*

*The background is the steep, tree-clad bank in gorgeous foliage piling away into the sky, which—unless you crick your neck—is not visible from the houseboat, so close and high are the trees.*

MR WALLACE WISTER *is pacing up and down. He walks slowly, twisting his heels into the deck and occasionally turning on them gracefully, his eyes fixedly following his upturned toes, his hands deep in his pockets, after the manner of one in deep and embarrassing thought. He occasionally whistles between his tongue and teeth—but not for joy. A rather soft-cheeked, very clean-shaven man in flannels—that is the first impression of him. Attention reveals the facts that he has good features, though his jaw is weakly relaxed; that he is probably about forty, and will in a few years be called 'embonpoint,' though at present he is only sedentary; that his expression—even under the worried look which he now wears—is amiable to the verge of wistfulness; and that he is obviously a peace-loving man.*

*To him* COLONEL JONES—*who, we may remember, left his wife's bedroom in the last act and has spent the interval ascending the stairs.* WISTER *stops dancing to greet him.*

WISTER [*feebly*]. Oh—hullo!

JONES. Sorry if I've kept you waiting.

WISTER. Oh, that's quite all right. [*Looking past* JONES *towards the stair with some apprehension*] Er . . .

JONES. What's the matter?

WISTER. Nothing. [*Suddenly*] How *is* Mrs Jones?

JONES [*slightly amused at the question*]. Betty? Well, she's——

[*He is interrupted by the appearance of* WOOTON—*the butler*—*who enters down left, bearing a tray laden with whisky-bottle, syphon, glasses, and a box of cigars.* JONES *welcomes the occupation thereby offered.*

JONES [*crossing to table where* WOOTON *places tray*]. Ah!

WOOTON [*discreetly*]. I thought you might like to give Mr Wister . . . [*He lowers his voice beyond hearing.*] Sir.

JONES [*not understanding*]. Eh?

WOOTON [*in the same mysterious tone*]. And . . .

[*He opens the cigar-box and retires knowingly.*

JONES. I see. [*To* WISTER] Whisky?

WISTER [*consciously*]. No—I don't think so, thanks.

JONES. Don't disappoint Wooton—have a . . .

WISTER [*seriously*]. No, thanks, really—I'm—I mean I'm not exactly on a *friendly* visit.

JONES. Nonsense.

WISTER [*with pathetic earnestness*]. No, it is *not* nonsense. I assure you—I'm . . .

JONES. We gave the Boer commanders a drink when they came out to arrange terms, and that wasn't a friendly visit by any means.

WISTER. That was a different matter, Jones. They hadn't got to consider the possibility that their wives might be watching their attitude from the next houseboat. [JONES *smiles slightly.*

WISTER [*hastily*]. No, I'm not joking, old man. Muriel is really very upset.

JONES [*sympathetically*]. I am sure she must be.

WISTER. Of course, *I* understand that you are not trying to win me over. I—I'd have a drink with you with pleasure, Jones—I'd like to. But I couldn't do it with the feeling that she might be watching me. She's relying on my—support—in this matter, and to let her so much as dream that I was disloyal—well, it would be brutal.

JONES. I understand. I am more sorry than I can say for what has happened.

WISTER [*non-committally*]. Yes.

JONES [*sitting wearily*]. Women are queer cattle, aren't they?

WISTER [*whole-heartedly*]. They are. [*Hastily*] Though, mind you—Muriel has had enough to make her . . .

JONES. I was not generalizing from *your* wife, Wister.

WISTER [*hastily*]. No, no, of course not. [*After a pause*] How *is* Betty?

JONES. She's lying down. Gone to bed, in fact. [*Seriously*] She's really quite ill, you know.

WISTER [*agreeing enthusiastically*]. Oh, I know.

JONES. Though what the dickens has taken her . . .

WISTER. It is astonishing, isn't it? I was more than astonished—I'd never have believed she could have gone on so! Her eyes were absolutely black! [*Depicting the scene vividly all over the stage*] We were sitting together on deck in those two little basket-chairs of ours—you know—and she—walked up to Muriel . . . Well, I can't show you how she looked because I should simply look ridiculous, and I assure you she looked anything but ridiculous. She—I'd never have believed it possible! I've always thought of your wife as a—you know what I mean—*Mental Character*! all Wit and Taste and Charm—abstract qualities rather than—Beauty and so forth. She seemed to me typical—I believe I've said so to you—she seemed to me typical of the spiritual trend of modern life—not ascetic—I don't mean that, but—spiritual. Well, some people call it superficial, but they're wrong—she's more than just *superficial*—she's *metaphysical*—no, I don't mean that either—*abstract—non-material.* You'd expect her to use abstract—non-material metaphors and . . . [*Frankly*] Well—what I mean to say is—her language to Muriel was not at all what you'd have expected.

JONES [*gravely*]. So I understand.

WISTER [*brought to earth by the pain in the other's tone*]. I'm awfully sorry for you, old man.

JONES. That's all right. Go ahead with what you wanted to say.

WISTER. Well—it amounts to this. [*Embarking*] Of course, I know it doesn't really affect one's character to be called names by some one . . . [*Pauses.*

JONES. Some one who is not responsible for their actions?

WISTER. Well, she really wasn't, you know.

JONES. I'm glad you think so.

WISTER [*resuming helplessly*]. Well, as I have said—although it can't really affect one's character to have it attacked by some one who is not responsible for their actions—still [*weakly*]—it isn't nice, you know.

JONES. In short, you want an apology.

WISTER [*apologetically*]. I know it's . . .

JONES [*almost smiling*]. My dear fellow, you are quite entitled to one.

WISTER. I am very glad you look at it in that way. It's a mere form, of course—I'd never have bothered you for one, only—Muriel's very upset . . .

JONES [*formally*]. Well, I apologize most profoundly to Mrs Wister for my wife's . . .

WISTER [*miserably, as the form of the apology dawns upon him*]. Yes—but . . .

JONES [*stopping*]. Well?

WISTER. *You* didn't do it.

JONES [*more gravely*]. You mean to insist upon Betty apologizing personally?

WISTER [*protesting*]. My dear fellow—don't talk as if I were so inconsiderate. I've got to consider how Muriel will look at . . .

JONES [*just a little impatiently*]. Very well, Mrs Wister insists . . .

WISTER [*now genuinely frightened*]. Oh, no, Jones, that's not fair to Muriel. She's not insisting—she's not asking—she's not so much as *saying* anything in the matter. She's refused to—she's far too upset—and, after all, I am her husband. She has left me to do whatever I think best, and I'm taking the only course that I consider appropriate to the situation. *I'm* insisting. *I* . . .

JONES. Yes, yes . . . Well. I'm very sorry, Wister. I've already shown Betty your note, and she refuses most decidedly to apologize.

WISTER [*triumphantly*]. I *told* Muriel she would!

JONES [*even his gravity shaken by this—after a pause*]. Well, you were right. You will be able to tell her that.

WISTER [*coming down to earth again and preparing to face the situation like a man*]. No, I—no. I—er—I mean [*heroically*]—I'm afraid I've got to be firm, Jones. I suppose it wouldn't be any use if I gave her time?

[*The connection between this last and being firm brings a puzzled and inquiring look into* JONES's *face.*

WISTER [*explaining*]. Give Betty time to . . .

[BETTY *appears up the steps right and steps on to the deck behind* WISTER, *who is too absorbed to notice her.*

WISTER [*innocently*]. You say she's quite beyond reasoning with at present?

JONES [*leaping from his seat. He has seen* BETTY *approach, and quite appreciates the sudden lift of her eyebrows and glance in his direction at this last*]. No, I do not say anything of the sort! Hang it all, Wister! I haven't so much as used the words.

WISTER [*amazed at the other's vehemence*]. What's the matter? What . . .

[*Following* JONES's *eye, he encounters* BETTY *just behind him. He gives a slight start, a feeble laugh, and is silent.*

BETTY. You needn't be afraid, Teddy. I shan't interrupt. [*Crossing to a chair which is a little way from the others*] I only want to sit quietly somewhere where I can hear what Ivor is saying and save him from promising anything that he can't perform. [*Sits.*] Go on just as if I were not here, please.

WISTER [*taking his eyes from her face with difficulty*]. Er [*to* JONES, *on whom his glance has fallen*]—what were we talking about?

BETTY [*helpfully*]. I think the last thing you said was—"You say she's quite beyond reasoning with at present."

JONES. Yes—but I hadn't. Wister, be fair! You know I hadn't said anything of the sort.

WISTER [*not in the least understanding the other's excitement, and sticking to his guns mechanically*]. I think you implied it. I mean—well, I certainly have the impression . . .

JONES. Well, you put it into your own head, then. Good Lord, man! It sounds as if I'd held out hopes of inducing Betty to apologize to-morrow—or next week—or some time.

WISTER [*the awful possibility occurring to him for the first time*]. Well, don't you?

JONES [*furiously*]. No, I don't.

BETTY [*with gratification*]. Well, that's something.

WISTER [*almost wailing*]. Then what are we to do?

BETTY. Go without an apology.

WISTER. But I can't.

BETTY. You'll have to.

WISTER. Jones, if this is final [*appealingly*]—is it?

JONES. Betty says so.

WISTER. Is it, Betty?

BETTY. It is.

WISTER. Then I am afraid I shall have to make myself beastly unpleasant. I'm afraid I shall have to consult my solicitor.

BETTY. I don't believe you've got one.

JONES [*turning to her*]. Betty, I thought you weren't going to interrupt?

BETTY. I can't help it. The sight of poor Teddy trying to bluff is too much for me.

WISTER [*appealingly to her*]. Oh, Mrs Jones, I am not trying to bluff! I have got a solicitor.

BETTY. Very well, go ahead and consult him.

WISTER. But I don't want to! I want to spare us all the—the—well, to say the least, the annoyance—I want to spare myself the annoyance. Do you know, I came down here for quiet? M—Betty, we are old friends! I ask it as a favour—not to Muriel, to me—put your pride in your pocket . . .

BETTY. Don't wear pockets.

WISTER [*almost weeping over her callousness*]. Oh, why, why?

BETTY. No room for 'em, I suppose.

WISTER. Don't—take me up so [*suddenly*]—there! that's just what's the matter with you! Egoism! Yes, you are! You're egoistical. You're so centred on what you think and feel that you can't be bothered with what other people are struggling to express. All you can do is to pick flaws in the way they do it. Surely—surely you can realize that what I meant was put your pride on one side—forget it . . .

BETTY [*calmly*]. You're wonderfully intelligent, Teddy, but I wish it didn't always make you cry.

[WISTER *opens his mouth to speak again. She anticipates him with some impatience.*

BETTY. Oh, of course I knew what you meant!

WISTER. Then why couldn't you listen to it instead of scoring off my poor metaphors? It isn't fair. It makes me feel that it's hopeless appealing to you.

BETTY. My dear child, that's just why I do it.

WISTER. There you are! You don't want to see anybody else's point of view! You don't want to realize the unhappiness taking this to a solicitor, and perhaps into court, will cause to poor Jones.

BETTY [*sharply*]. You needn't worry about "poor Jones."

WISTER. Well, then, to me.

BETTY. And Muriel?

WISTER [*checked*]. What?

BETTY. Do tell me if you think it will break Muriel's heart so see me in the dock. They do put you in the dock for libel, don't they?

WISTER. You're arguing against yourself, Betty. You . . .

JONES [*bringing a note of restraint into the conversation*]. Wister, does this—I wasn't present, remember—does this really amount to a criminal libel?

WISTER. Well, it might. There is some doubt about it.

BETTY. Oh, you've consulted your solicitor already, have you?

WISTER. No—Muriel is rather an authority . . .

BETTY. Oho! She's been reckoning up how long she can get me, has she?

JONES. Betty, why will you impute such enmity—to Mrs Wister?

BETTY. She's been a good friend to me, hasn't she?

JONES. You've done nothing to make her one. Still—I think her actions up to now have been quite natural and——

BETTY [*interrupting him*]. Oh, so do I! They are just what I'd have expected.

WISTER [*genuinely pleased*]. I'm glad to hear you say that. [*To* JONES] We are not quite clear as to what actually constitutes a criminal libel, Jones. Muriel thinks that to accuse anybody of anything criminal must be a criminal libel, whereas to accuse them of anything only—immoral—well—she's not so clear about that. It depends upon whether an apology is offered or something.

[BETTY, *who has been very near laughter several times, at last gives way to it.*

[*Looking at her with gentle reproach*] Of course, Betty, your brother's a K.C.; you *ought* to know more than she does about these things.

BETTY. I do.

JONES. Then perhaps you'll . . .

BETTY [*happily*]. I'm not going to tell you and rob some poor

solicitor of his fees. You'd better pull over to the boathouse and ring up yours.

WISTER. Well—even if Muriel *is* wrong as to details, surely to accuse anyone of anything criminal and refuse to apologize as well—surely *that's* criminal libel?

JONES. Wister, do you mean to say that Betty actually accused your wife of—anything criminal?

WISTER. Well, it will look as if she had at the inquest.

BETTY [*with a roar of laughter*]. The what?

WISTER. Oh, don't—don't—the trial. Don't take me up so quickly. I'm very worried.

JONES [*decidedly*]. Here. I must come with you and have a talk to Muriel.

BETTY [*stopping her laugh and speaking peremptorily*]. Ivor!

JONES. Betty, you must let me act for you in this. I . . .

BETTY. If you go I shall come with you and . . .

[*A* MAN *in a well-cut serge suit appears upon the stairs and inquires:*

BELASIS. May I come up?

JONES [*surprised and turning*]. What? [*Recognizing the newcomer*] Hullo! Yes, come up. [*Shaking hands with him and putting the question with a full appreciation of its humour under the circumstances*] What constitutes a criminal libel, Geoffrey?

[*The newcomer expresses none but the merest courtesy and surprise—he is obviously a professional man. He replies nonchalantly as he crosses to* BETTY.

BELASIS. A criminal libel, eh? [*Shaking* BETTY's *hand*] How are you, Betty? [*Returning to the subject*] Well [*seeing* WISTER]—Mr Wallace Wister, I believe?

WISTER [*dubiously*]. Ye-es.

BELASIS. My sister introduced us at Henley last year, you may remember. My name is Belasis . . .

WISTER. Oh, yes—I—you'll think me very rude. I knew your face, but—my memory's . . .

[*A gesture explains that it is lost or mislaid somewhere in the vicinity.*

BELASIS [*smiling*]. You should train it.

BETTY. Come on, Geoffrey: tell them what a criminal libel is.

BELASIS [*pleasantly*]. Well—any libel is a criminal libel, you know.

JONES. What?

WISTER. Surely there is some difference between a criminal libel and a . . . [*He pauses for reply.*

BELASIS. Only the difference of how the person libelled likes to look at it.

WISTER [*simply and sufficiently*]. Good God!

BETTY [*helpfully*]. What would you say generally influences their decision, Geoffrey?

BELASIS. Well—if they are spitefully inclined . . .

JONES [*arriving at a decision independently of this last*]. I think I'll come along at once and have a talk to Muriel, may I?

WISTER. Do.

BETTY [*twinkling*]. I thought you were so shocked at my imputing anything like enmity to Muriel.

JONES. Betty, I still do not see any reason why Mrs Wister should be accused of . . .

BETTY [*drily*]. But you're taking no chances? Quite right, dear. [*Rising*] Well, I'm coming with you.

JONES [*hovering with* WISTER *up right*]. Betty! [*In half-humorous appeal to their visitor*] Geoffrey, what am I to do?

BELASIS [*who has gone up to the table, and is pouring himself out a whisky-and-soda with magnificent aloofness from the situation round him*]. I seem to be plunged *in medias res* rather, don't I? I have a rule myself; in a case of libel never let your client meet the plaintiff in your presence, or you may yourself be called as a witness to—further libels. I don't know if my rule applies here?

JONES. It does rather.

BELASIS. Curious.

[*He returns to his syphonading of the evaporating whisky.*

JONES. Betty, won't you let me go and . . .

BETTY [*firmly*]. No, I won't. Send you to—beg me off! Why, I'd rather apologize myself than see you grovelling to . . .

JONES [*in heartfelt appeal*]. Oh, Betty, I wish you would!

BETTY. Well—perhaps I will—on conditions.

JONES [*joyfully*]. What are they?

BETTY [*after a scarcely perceptible pause, during which she reconsiders the condition and approves of it*]. I'll apologize to Muriel provided she leaves the river.

JONES. Betty!

BETTY. Well?

JONES. I am afraid the idea is ridiculous.

BETTY [*incensed*]. Ridiculous? I think it's a very sensible condition! It's not a bit of good my apologizing to her this evening when I may meet her again to-morrow and insult her all over again.

JONES. If you really have reached such a pitch that you cannot tolerate the sight of Mrs Wister, Betty, don't you think it would be easier if *we* were to leave the river?

BETTY [*with beautiful firmness*]. *I'm* not going to be turned off the river by Muriel Wister.

WISTER [*miserably*]. It's just like a game! I know exactly what everybody is going to say next, only I can't stop them.

JONES [*to him*]. You mean that Muriel will say the same thing.

WISTER [*with conviction*]. I can hear her saying it!

JONES. Well, it's quite natural . . .

BETTY [*answering* WISTER, *not her husband*]. Oh? She wants things all her own way, does she? Apologize! Turn me off the river! Well, Teddy, you can go back and tell her that she won't get either. I've met you half-way; I've stated my terms . . .

JONES [*quietly*]. You overlook the fact, Betty, that you are not in a position to "state terms."

BETTY [*sharply*]. Aren't I? *You want* an apology, I don't! You've been positively begging me for one; both of you! Well, then, surely I——

JONES [*interrupting as reasonably as ever*]. To us—yes. I think both Wister and I are willing to do anything in our power . . .

WISTER [*enthusiastically*]. Oh, yes!

JONES [*continuing*]. But Muriel is neither begging nor even *asking* for anything, so you can't very well exact terms from her.

BETTY [*coming to a decision easily*]. All right. I don't insist upon Muriel leaving the river of her own free will. Let Teddy take her away. [*All hearts go out to* WISTER, *who sighs.* BETTY *follows it up.*] I'll apologize to her if he will. It'll be a waste of time if he won't. We are bound to meet and . . . [*Suddenly to* JONES] You are going to take me down to the lawns to-night. She is certain to be there.

WISTER [*hastily*]. I don't think she will be—she's—she was going, but . . . [*Suddenly*] Jones, I think I'll get back and see how she is. [*Turns to go and turns back.*] I suppose I'd better tell her that Betty's quite beyond reasoning at present!

JONES [*his eyes unflinchingly on* BETTY]. You may say that I say she is.

WISTER. Thanks awfully.

[*He patters down the stairs and away right.* JONES *returns to the table and pours himself out a drink.* BETTY *has covered her moral defeat when he spoke last by patting up the cushions and making herself comfortable in the chair on the right of the table.* BELASIS *is in the chair left of it. They are both, of course, at lounging distance from the table.*

JONES [*after a drink—calmly*]. Well, Geoffrey, you see where we are. Now, I suppose you'd like to know how we got here?

BELASIS. No, thanks. I've got a very instructive view of the case.

JONES [*going down to the chair down right and sitting*]. Oh, you know what's happened, then?

BELASIS. No, no, no. I don't want to know what's happened.

JONES. Yes. I suppose you can guess.

BELASIS [*shocked*]. Guess? Certainly not. I don't require to know. The dream of my life is to isolate the pure case from the accident to which it is attached. You have succeeded in presenting this one to me as a perfectly isolated phenomenon. It's like a . . .

BETTY [*who has not been taking any notice of them, her eyes being fixed on the contents of the table*]. I suppose you'd think me perfectly outrageous if I said I'd like a good stiff whisky?

JONES [*coldly*]. Not at all.

BETTY [*still looking at the bottle fixedly*]. I know I don't usually . . .

JONES. You have been doing one or two things a little out of the common lately.

BETTY [*deciding*]. No—I won't. I had a sort of an idea that it might buck me up, that's all.

JONES [*sarcastically*]. Do you need bucking up?

BETTY. I don't know. I feel a bit—hungry and my throat's as dry as . . . Touch that bell, Geoffrey, will you?

BELASIS [*obeying*]. This weather is very trying. You are better off here than in town, though. I didn't know what it was about, but I was quite grateful for your message that you wanted to see me.

BETTY. I didn't want to see you.

BELASIS. You . . . [*Understanding*] Oh, I see! [*To* JONES] That's why you tried to be facetious in your telegram, Ivor. You know you shouldn't; you only puzzled me.

JONES. What are you talking about? What telegram?

BELASIS. Didn't . . . [*Looking from one to the other and growing discreet*] Er . . .

BETTY. Go on, Geoffrey. It's too late to be discreet now. Tell him that you received his telegram so that he can look surprised and say he never sent one.

JONES [*calmly*]. Well, I didn't. What was the telegram you received, Geoffrey?

BELASIS [*producing telegram and reading*]. "Fancy! Your sister wants to see you!"

JONES. Eh?

BELASIS [*repeating*]. "Fancy! Your sister wants to see you!"

JONES. Unsigned? [BELASIS *merely nods.*

BETTY [*cheerfully*]. You really ought to have signed it, Ivor. It's in quite your best vein.

JONES [*coldly*]. Possibly, but I didn't send it. [*Rising and holding out his hand for the telegram*] May I see it?

[BELASIS *hands it over.* JONES *stands reading it.* WOOTON *enters down left.*

WOOTON. You rang, sir? [JONES *looks round, but* BETTY *speaks.*

BETTY. I did. Bring me up some lemonade.

WOOTON [*turning to go*]. Yes, madam.

JONES [*bringing* BETTY *the telegram in calm triumph*]. If you look at this, Betty, you will find that it was sent from this district at twelve noon. Well, at twelve noon I was the other side of Hambledon Lock. [*His voice betrays his elation.*] I can show you the lock-tickets.

BETTY [*with a laugh*]. Oh, those lock-tickets!

JONES. Well, at least they must convince you.

BETTY. They do. Your alibi is established. Though I shouldn't have minded if you had sent for Geoffrey, so . . .

[JONES *puts the telegram on table and returns to his chair down right, as* WOOTON *enters with the lemonade left. He brings it to above table and places it thereon.*

BELASIS [*sticking to the telegram subject*]. I wonder who did send it, then?

JONES [*sitting*]. Well—how about Wister?

BELASIS. Quite possibly.

BETTY. Poor dear Teddy—I'm sure he'd like to see me well defended. Though how he had the heart to be funny . . . Perhaps he had a word to spare and . . . [*Takes telegram from table and counts words*] No. [*Reading with exaggerated emphasis*] "Fancy!!!" [*Looking up*] It isn't funny at all, you know; it—well, it's cheek.

[WOOTON *has been pouring out the lemonade behind the table quietly. Perhaps his eyelid wavers at the last remark of his mistress. Anyway,* JONES—*who has been watching him idly—suddenly brings him into the discussion.*

JONES. Do you know anything about this, Wooton?

[WOOTON *draws himself quietly to attention and delivers his reply with the simple dignity and preparedness of one used to answering official inquiries.*

WOOTON. I must plead guilty, sir; though not intending cheek.

BETTY [*overjoyed, not to say touched*]. Bless him!

WOOTON [*continuing*]. I ask you to consider, sir, that I was the only man at home when the—frarcar—occurred. If I have shown hexess of zeal I hope you will appreciate the fact that I was deeply shaken by what had taken place, and that I acted to the best of my ability solely in the interest of yourself, sir, and you, madam.

JONES [*amused, but still puzzled*]. Yes, but—why in the world did you word your telegram . . .

[BETTY, *who is loving the whole situation, hands him the telegram, which he reads minutely before replying.*

WOOTON [*laying it on the table and continuing his evidence*]. Liberties, sir, have been taken with my text. All that I wished to convey to Mr Belasis was that I fancied his sister would like to see him.

JONES [*going over the words in his mind*]. Oh, I see.

WOOTON. Yes, sir. The marks of acclamation must have been added in transit.

JONES [*dismissing him with forgiveness*]. Very well.

WOOTON [*seriously to* BETTY]. I hope, madam, you will exonerate me from any suspicion of cheek. . . .

BETTY. I withdraw the word unconditionally, Wooton.

WOOTON. Thank you, madam.

[WOOTON *exits down left with dignity.* BETTY *turns to the others with that mixture of appreciation of the joke and realization of the essence of the situation which characterizes her when her temper is not in full possession of her.*

BETTY. Poor dear! What a lot of trouble I am giving every one.

BELASIS. Believe me, I had nothing half so pleasant to do as to come down here.

BETTY. I wasn't thinking of you. I was thinking of poor old Wooton being "deeply shaken" by the "frarcar" this morning and . . .

[*The humour of it triumphs, and she laughs quietly.*

BELASIS [*to* JONES]. I don't think I remember Wooton. He's not . . .

JONES. Oh, yes, you do. You've always seen him in uniform, that's all. He was with me at Aldershot last year.

BELASIS [*vaguely recollecting*]. Oh, yes . . .

JONES. He took his discharge when I retired from the regiment, and became a pekin with me.

BELASIS. Devotion.

BETTY [*rising briskly*]. Well, now that he has brought you down, Geoffrey, you'll stay a day or two, won't you?

BELASIS [*chaffing her*]. To watch the case—literally? Would you like me to?

BETTY. I'd like you to stay, of course [*pointedly*], but *not* professionally.

BELASIS. Thank you, Betty.

JONES [*drily*]. You may find us a little—er . . .

[*He affects to be at a loss for a word.*

BETTY [*decidedly, but not resentfully—the atmosphere is becoming less turgid, and the usual excellent* BETTY *is coming out on top*]. No, he won't. [*To* JONES] I'll go and have your dressing-room sacked.

BELASIS. Don't sack anything on my account, *please*.

BETTY [*going*]. You don't want to sleep among boot-trees.

JONES [*considerately*]. Can't Wooton . . .

BETTY [*with the firmness of a good hostess*]. Certainly not.

[*Exits downstairs right.*

[JONES *watches her off courteously before sitting again.*

JONES [*with affectionate pride*]. She must look after you herself, you see.

BELASIS [*with equally keen appreciation*]. She's a great hostess.

JONES. She's a perfect hostess. [*With growing enthusiasm*] She's tactful, amusing, her taste is excellent, her sense of humour—quite surprising. In fact, she's a most charming—lovable woman—and yet . . .

[*A gesture supplies the reference to her recent behaviour, which is the completion of the sentence.*

BELASIS. Oh, don't say "and yet"! Give *post-hoc-propter-hoc* a chance—it sometimes follows, you know.

JONES. You only know that she's made a scene, Geoffrey; you don't know the circumstances.

BELASIS. She didn't make the circumstances, Jones.

JONES [*not understanding this, but conceding it in order to get on*]. No—but—well, at least you ought to know the ridiculous reason that she adduces for——

BELASIS [*stopping him with the authority of a master and something of the exquisite irritation of a dilettante*]. My dear fellow, I don't want to know the reason she adduces. If this goes into court—which heaven forbid—our first duty will be to hide the fact that Betty had adduced any reason at all for her behaviour.

JONES. She'll have to offer some explanation.

BELASIS. No, no, believe me, no! We are in England—not France. It will be a British jury which we shall have to face. In the eyes of a British jury for a woman to offer a reason for doing anything only makes her offence the blacker.

JONES [*with some impatience*]. Yes, that's very nice. You don't know the reason. She swears it isn't jealousy.

BELASIS. I don't care what she swears it isn't, or what she swears it is. It has nothing whatever to do with what she did . . .

JONES [*a little obstinately*]. You'd expect it to have.

BELASIS. I would not. For the very same reason she might have thrown vitriol; drowned herself; or said nothing whatever on the subject. Again: she might have insulted Mrs Wister in precisely this manner for a dozen different reasons—mightn't she?

JONES. Yes, I suppose she might . . .

BELASIS. Well, then, my dear Ivor . . .

JONES. Why did she do it, then?

BELASIS. I can answer that question if you wish.

JONES. I wish you would, then.

BELASIS. You are sceptical? Well—of course I don't pretend to have the whole list of reasons at my tongue's end, but roughly: My sister's made this—scene—using language strong enough to warrant legal proceedings . . .

JONES [*grimly*]. *Bad* language.

BELASIS [*accepting it undisturbed*]. Bad language—well . . .

[*He pauses deliberately for effect.*

JONES. Well?

BELASIS [*artistically*]. Well: Because she lives in the twentieth century; because she is inhabiting a houseboat on a fashionable reach of the Thames; because it is abnormally hot—the hottest summer on record, in fact——

JONES [*interrupting almost with choler*]. My good . . .

BELASIS [*stopping politely*]. Well?

JONES. You're not going to maintain that living on a houseboat on the Thames has taught Betty bad language.

BELASIS. No. That's the twentieth century. If you use your imagination, Jones, you will realize that there can be very few people at the present day who are really without a working knowledge of—bad language. [*With affected haste*] Though I do not suggest that they practise. [*Leaning back lazily*] The *milieu* and—the weather supplied other conducements: the irritations of semi-publicity; of a small community; of general idleness; of physical discomfort. Then again they supplied Example. There are always 'scenes' on the river, and we are still intensey imitative—apes—apes.

[JONES *rises impatiently and paces the deck.* BELASIS *checks his flow of language to remark with a suspicion of a twinkle:*

BELASIS. You don't seem soothed!

JONES [*with aggressive candour*]. I'm not. I don't see where all your theories lead.

BELASIS [*smiling kindly*]. I thought you wanted to know why Betty made this scene.

JONES. I do. But your hotch-potch of subsidiary motives isn't going to tell me. [*With immense vehemence, and almost betraying an injured tone*] *She says* . . .

BELASIS. The fact of the matter is, Ivor, that you are very like my British jury; you don't like poor Betty to think she has a reason at all.

JONES [*angrily*]. I don't like her to think that I've been made a laughing stock of, naturally.

BELASIS [*profoundly*]. I see.

JONES [*continuing*]. I haven't! I've only been commonly courteous to a neighbour. [*Appealingly*] Do you really think that a woman is so sensitive to what people think of her husband that . . .

BELASIS [*throwing up his hand*]. Please don't ask me subtle questions about women. I don't profess to understand them. I am a barrister.

JONES. You have women clients.

BELASIS. I never have women jurors. [JONES *opens his mouth to reprove the wisdom of this, but* BELASIS, *hurrying on, forestalls him.*] I am not being cynical. I must talk a language that my jury will under-

stand. I must confine myself to suggesting Love as the motive for a woman's actions when they are benevolent, and jealousy when they are—not. [*With meaning*] Just as you seem to want to do, only . . .

JONES. Only she swears she *isn't* jealous.

BELASIS. All jealous people do that.

JONES. You think she is, then?

BELASIS. I say I think all angry women are. It's a labour-saving device of mine. We are not called upon to understand her point of view; only to get her out of this mess.

JONES. But, man alive! if we once discover her point of view we *can* get her out of it.

BELASIS. Can we?

JONES. Of course! If she really has let her views get so warped that she feels it more deeply to see me—well, let us say it—made a fool of—than she would to find me unfaithful to her, all we've got to do is to re-establish her sense of proportion.

BELASIS [*with a faint trace of apprehension*]. Yes. Er . . You don't want me to help you to do that, do you?

JONES [*scarcely listening, so intent is he on his own thoughts*]. No. No. If it's . . . I suppose it must be. [*Compassionately*] Poor little woman! It's awful to think that she has worked herself into such a state, and spoilt her summer over nothing—but . . .

BELASIS. She doesn't regard it as nothing if she has.

JONES [*gazing at him abstractedly*]. Yes—as you say—her sense of proportion is warped. She has never known what real jealousy was and this—this pitiful hypersensitiveness to trifles like . . . [*Generously*] You are quite right, Geoffrey. The weather has a lot to do with it.

BELASIS [*with invisible irony*]. Thanks.

JONES [*shaking off his pensive mood*]. I'm glad I've had this chat with you, Geoffrey. It's something to have come to a definite conclusion, however unpleasant it may be. I don't like to think that I have upset Betty by making an ass of myself; still, I can take a definite course now—and once Betty sees how ridiculous it is for reasonable beings to make scenes over such trifles—she'll apologize to Muriel and . .

[*A wave of the hand concludes the matter.*

BELASIS. You think so?

JONES. Oh, yes. Betty is obstinate, but only when she thinks herself in the right—as she does at present.

BELASIS [*nodding appreciatively*]. And you're just going to persuade her she's not.

JONES [*perfectly simply and confidently*]. Yes. It's her sense of proportion. She has some excuse. I dare say it's a bit trying for an intelligent woman to see her husband turned into an errand boy.

[*A pathetic voice precedes* Mr Wister *up the stairs.*

Wister. May I come up?

Jones [*rising*]. Hullo! Yes, come along. [Wister *gains the deck.*

Wister [*glancing at the table*]. I wish you'd give me just a little soda-water.

Jones [*going to table*]. Certainly. Is this a friendly visit, then?

Wister [*sufficiently*]. She's lying down. [*Receives the drink from* Jones *and puts it to his lips.*] Thanks. Oh . . . you've given me whisky.

Jones. I'm sorry.

Wister [*accommodatingly*]. It doesn't matter; only I've had one or two already since . . . [*Drains the glass.*

[Betty *climbs smiling on to the deck. She has quite lost the feverish, angry mood, and even shaken off the sarcastic, cruel humour which has been more on the surface. It is obvious that left alone she might seek peace herself.*

Betty. Well, Teddy, come back to see if I am more reasonable?

Wister [*very gravely*]. Betty, don't joke. This is getting very, very serious.

Jones. How?

Wister [*to* Belasis]. I do hope you are wrong about a libel being criminal or not, just as the aggressor likes to take it.

Belasis. It is usually the—aggressed who . . .

Wister. Yes—I mean the aggressed. Muriel *is* the aggressed, isn't she?

Betty. I wonder you can forget that, Teddy . . .

Wister. Betty, I—Jones, listen—and don't start or anything. My nerves are simply on edge.

Betty. Poor Teddy! It's a shame. Now, then, Teddy, go ahead—what is it?

Wister. Well, though you know Muriel is leaving all this affair to me—refusing to so much as express an opinion—still, I am, in a sense, controlled by her . . . [Betty *snorts once and is silent.* Wister *addresses himself earnestly to her.*] I don't mean she controls me intentionally, but I must clear things up in a way that she can understand and appreciate. I am controlled by her point of view. [*Wavering towards* Jones] Of course, as far as I am concerned . . .

Jones [*cutting him short*]. We quite understand. Go ahead.

Wister [*bracing himself up*]. Well—well, I can see that Muriel thinks that since the law gives me no guidance in deciding whether to class this as a criminal libel or a religious one . . . [Betty *laughs. He looks at her reproachfully.*] I mean a . . .

Belasis [*quietly*]. A civil one—go on, Mr Wister.

Wister. Well, we are compelled to trust to our natural sense of

justice, which had already told us that to accuse anyone of anything criminal ought to amount to a criminal libel, even if it didn't. Of course, she didn't say that in so many words, but I could see that it was what she thought.

JONES. Quite so.

WISTER. Well—so unless you apologize . . .

BETTY [*encouraging him*]. Well?

WISTER. Well, I shall ring up my solicitor now.

BELASIS [*gently*]. You won't find him at his office.

WISTER. I know his private address. He does lots of little things for us. [*Tragically*] That's it. That's what I'm coming to! It's awful!

BETTY [*interested*]. What is?

WISTER [*preferring to address* JONES]. Jones—while we were at Henley some one rang my wife up at the hotel and told her over the 'phone that they had heard some people in the next punt to theirs at the regatta saying the most awful things about her.

JONES. Who?

WISTER. We don't know. They wouldn't say.

JONES. Well, who rang you up?

WISTER. We don't know. They rang off.

BETTY [*calmly*]. How very annoying.

BELASIS. A river habit—interesting, but—irrelevant, surely.

WISTER. No! That's it! Pertram—our solicitor—has that case in hand. Can't you see how it will prejudice the case against Betty?

BELASIS. No.

WISTER. Oh, good gracious, *yes*! Muriel is being cross-examined. "Have you ever been libelled before?" Reluctantly—"Yes." "Will you give us particulars?" Well, of course, she has to do so. Then—"You do not suggest that this libel emanated from Mrs Jones also?" "Oh, no!" [*Terribly*] "But you cannot be sure that she was not responsible for it?" [*Appealingly*] Well, you know, Muriel couldn't swear that she was.

BETTY [*who has hardened to ice in the few moments' exposition of* WISTER'S *fears for her safety*]. I am certain she couldn't. [*With dangerous brightness*] All right, Teddy. I shall spend the autumn in prison.

WISTER. Betty!

BETTY. You don't think I'm going to be frightened into apologizing—do you?

WISTER. Betty—don't talk as if I were a—villain!

BETTY. What else are you? Plotting and planning to make things look worse than they really are in the hope that you can frighten me—you dirty little blackguard! [*Suddenly trying to pull herself together*

*and becoming more exasperated and less tense*] I do think it's too bad! Here it is the hottest weather I have ever been through, and everybody seems to be conspiring to keep me in a raging temper!

[*She sits back in her chair determinedly.*

BELASIS. Let me give you some soda-water . . .

BETTY [*furiously*]. Ss——! [*Appreciating that it will give her something to do*] Thank you.

[BELASIS *tactfully brings her a little soda-water in a glass, and she sits sipping it while* JONES *takes* WISTER *by the arm and leads him away from her.*

JONES [*speaking with healthy authority*]. Look here, Wister. This has gone far enough. Betty has refused to apologize, and I am certainly not going to try to induce her to, now that you have started threats.

WISTER. Jones . . .

JONES. Oh, yes, I know; it's Muriel. Don't you realize that both these women are [*checking the word and substituting*]—not responsible for their actions? They would neither of them be behaving like this if it were not the hottest summer on record. And if you're a man of any sense you must see that life here on the river is not soothing. There's the publicity of it. The small community . . .

WISTER [*agreeing enthusiastically and sincerely*]. Quite so, old man! I've always said so myself.

JONES [*lowering his voice*]. Look here, I'll tell you something—you'll see how absurd the whole affair is. All this scene is because Betty thinks that by dancing attendance on Muriel I have made myself look ridiculous. . . .

WISTER [*interrupting ecstatically*]. Oh, I *knew* that! I've been watching you, and I could see that it was driving her frantic, poor soul! We don't understand the unselfishness of women, Jones! They watch over us like little children, only it's our dignity that they . . .

JONES [*severely*]. Look here, Wister, pull yourself together. You've had too many whiskies—I should say. Don't talk any more rot or I shall be losing my balance next, and then Belasis will be the only sane person on two houseboats. You go back and have a sleep and come back in the cool of the morning and tell us that all this solicitor nonsense was bluff and that you'd had too much to drink—we'll believe you. And if you like to ask Betty quite courteously, *then*—well, I'll guarantee that she will apologize, but if you say another word about libels—I'll pitch you into the river!

WISTER [*from the bottom of his heart*]. I wish you would.

JONES [*in complete control of the situation*]. Geoffrey, see Wister into his dinghy for me, will you?

BELASIS. Certainly.

JONES [*giving further orders*]. You ought to be dressing for dinner—we . . .

BELASIS [*mildly resenting the unnecessary pointing of* JONES's *meaning*]. All right. [*To* WISTER] Can I help you?

WISTER. I don't think I'm going back, just at the moment. I'm going to scull up and down for a bit.

[*Disappears from sight followed by* BELASIS.

JONES [*after a marked pause, to* BETTY]. Now, Betty, this is coming to an end.

BETTY [*pleasantly*]. I'm glad—for your sake, dear. You were beginning to get quite worried about it, weren't you?

JONES [*grimly*]. I was. So worried that I am going to take a very unpleasant course.

BETTY. Oh, dear!

JONES. I—want to make you see this [*sarcastically*]—this shocking behaviour of mine in its true proportion, and I am going to tell you one or two things about my past life which——

BETTY. Good gracious, Ivor. Is *that* an unpleasant course?

JONES. It is.

BETTY. Then why do you set out on it with such gusto every time we have a row?

JONES [*surprised*]. Do I?

BETTY. Ten times at least since you gave up your regiment you have turned that ghastly past on to me.

JONES. You have never listened.

BETTY. No, and I don't mean to now. I don't want to hear anything about it. The subject doesn't allure me. Why must you always rake it up? . . .

JONES [*getting very angry*]. I didn't know that I always did "rake it up"! On this occasion I certainly do not do so without a very good reason.

BETTY [*challenging it*]. Well? That is?

JONES [*suddenly becoming tender and persuasive—almost commiseratively to her*]. Betty dear, you've lost your sense of proportion. You overestimate trifles and make mountains out of molehills. You have never known what it was to be really jealous of me, so you magnify these trifles into—serious offences. Well, if to readjust your unhealthy point of view I tell you things which—shock you, I ask——

BETTY [*interrupting him impatiently*]. Oh, for goodness' sake, stop! It's very kind of you, but I don't want to be shocked. I haven't overestimated this making a tame poodle of yourself for Muriel to teach tricks to. I couldn't overestimate it. It's degrading and awful. You may have had a ghastly past——

JONES [*protesting*]. Betty! . . .

BETTY. Well, you are always hinting that you have, and I'll take your word for it. But has that ghastly past ever made you look half so—*cheap*—as you have looked this summer?

JONES. You have noticed this and . . .

BETTY. I have always noticed you, Ivor. Believe me, this is an actual thing: you hold your head a different way; you look older . . .

JONES. Well, I am older. I have given up my regiment, too.

BETTY. Nonsense. You'll get your staff appointment. You've got your best years ahead of you. Do you think I am going to look on while you devote them to fetching hairpins for a fool of a woman—I've never in my life let you fetch and carry for me.

JONES. No, I know you haven't. You are right in a way. I see I have made myself rather cheap—but after all, Betty, it's—nothing to make this fuss over. It seems worse to you because you have no standard of comparison. [*Decidedly*] I must tell you . . .

BETTY. I won't be told anything. My dear boy, I know what you're going to tell me. You're going to tell me that your life has not been quite perfect. Well, you needn't; I never thought it had.

JONES. Betty!

BETTY [*hurrying on*]. I've always taken it for granted it wasn't.

JONES. You've always taken it for *granted* it wasn't? You've lived with me for—Betty, you can't mean what I mean. You can't have taken it for granted that . . .

[BETTY *in all sincerity of purpose—which is not to irritate* JONES, *but to evade hearing—places her fingers impatiently in her ears.*

JONES [*absolutely seeing red at this treatment*]. By God! You're damn well going to listen! [*He pulls her hands from her head by sheer brute force, then collapses into apologies.*] I—you—I beg your pardon, Betty. I—lost my temper. Forgive me. I suppose you can't realize how maddening it is to have anyone stop up their ears when you are trying to tell them something that you would give worlds for them not to hear.

BETTY [*with a little angry laugh*]. No, I can't! I should think it would make it much easier.

JONES [*blowing up once and for all*]. Laugh, laugh, laugh! Superficial! Wister was quite right about you! You skate over the surface of life—you daren't look into its depths. Well, you can go on skating and looking after my tea-table behaviour—I won't worry you with things that matter again.

[*He stamps off.* BETTY *remains quite still in her chair. The sun has sunk low in the heavens, and the shadows are long. From off down the right stairs comes the voice of* ALICE *and*

*that of* JONES: *"Hullo, Alice, back already?" "Yes, I came back early in case . . . Is Betty?" "No, she's on deck. Go up."*

[*A moment's pause.* ALICE *comes on up.*

ALICE [*crossing to her friend*]. I'm awfully early—you said . . . [*Kisses* BETTY *and looks at her in some surprise.*] Crying?

BETTY [*sharply*]. Crying? No! What have I got to cry about?

[ALICE *is successfully checked. At this moment* WOOTON *appears at top of stairs carrying a large folded table.*

BETTY [*continuing rather incoherently*]. I always knew it.

ALICE. What?

[WOOTON *has the misfortune to catch the table's end in the awning where it touches the deck.*

ALICE [*crossing to him*]. Let me help you, Wooton. [*She lifts back the awning and the table is released, then turning to speak to* BETTY.] What did you . . .

[*But* BETTY *has disappeared from the deck, having bolted as soon as* ALICE *crossed.*

WOOTON. I beg pardon, miss?

ALICE [*looking after* BETTY *to right*]. I was speaking to Mrs Jones, I thought . . .

## ACT III

SCENE: *The deck about an hour later, arranged for dinner.*

*Flaps of the awning have been drawn down at back and to left, forming a sort of marquee open to the front and right sides, its roof extending its shelter to the centre of the deck. Under this shelter* LESCELINE *is putting the finishing touches to a dinner-table laid for four. A large table enough to accommodate more, and therefore allowing these generous space both to waggle their elbows* and *be seen by the audience —which is more important.*

*The sun has set, and the pearl and violet lights of evening are supplemented on the houseboat by a couple of gorgeous Chinese lanterns hanging over the stairheads right and left, and a large standard lamp with a Chinese-lantern-shaped shade above the space between the dining-table and the little occasional table which serves as a side-table during meals on deck. Beside these greater lights, candles—aureoles of topaz around dark shades—decorate the table; indeed the greater part of the deck is anything but dark, only the distances are lost in a dusk against which the lights and those they fall upon stand out luminously.*

*Far away a gramophone is coming to the end of a record—a soprano and tenor duet, mellowed by the distance into something quite beautiful.*

ALICE *and* COLONEL JONES *are leaning over the rail to right, talking quietly and intermittently. He is in a dinner-jacket, she in the simple dinner-dress in which she returns in the previous Act. A brooding awkwardness seems to be upon them.* JONES *is saying, as the curtain goes up:*

JONES. Yes.

[*Giving the monosyllable a weight and value which suggest that he doesn't mean it literally.*

ALICE [*after a detaching pause*]. I'm sorry if . . .

JONES [*closing the subject*]. Oh, my dear Alice, you are quite right to be guided by what you consider loyal to Betty. One . . .

[BELASIS, *having dressed, comes on deck right.* JONES *is between him and* ALICE, *so he only sees him.*

BELASIS. Hullo!

JONES [*turning*]. Hullo! Cabin all right?

BELASIS. Quite, thanks. [*Seeing* ALICE *and coming down*] You don't remember me, Miss Meyne.

ALICE. Oh, yes, I do. [*They shake hands.*] I'm so glad they've had the sense to get you down.

[WOOTON *enters, carrying a bottle of hock to the table.*

BELASIS [*replying to* ALICE *with a smile*]. Oh, they haven't had the sense to. I'm [*he smiles towards* WOOTON]—I'm briefed by the Servants' Hall, aren't I, Wooton?

WOOTON [*reproachfully*]. Oh, sir!

ALICE. What do you mean?

[BELASIS *smiles enigmatically and shakes his head.* LESCELINE *is about to exit left.* JONES *stops her with a question.*

JONES. Is your mistress dressed yet, Lesceline?

LESCELINE. Oh, yes, sir. I finished fastening her dress for her a quarter of an hour ago. I think she's writing letters, sir.

JONES. Writing letters?

LESCELINE. Yes, sir.

[*She exits left, followed after a moment by* WOOTON.

ALICE [*seeking escape*]. May I go down to her?

JONES. Do, if you'd like to.

ALICE. I don't suppose she'll mind. [*Exits downstairs right.*

[JONES *watches her off, then flings himself wearily into one of the basket-chairs.*

JONES [*with considerable feeling*]. Isn't it marvellous how women hang together?

BELASIS [*taking the chair opposite to him*]. Is it?

JONES [*sarcastically*]. Don't you consider it so?

BELASIS [*judicially*]. Well, no. On certain grounds I should expect them to hang together. On certain grounds every group of units must hang together. The laws of cosmogony . . .

JONES [*irritably—in fact, angrily*]. Oh, for heaven's sake!!! You really are a most remarkable comforter, Geoffrey.

BELASIS. Do you want comforting? I'm sorry.

JONES. Well, I should say that if ever a man did not want deliberate irritating . . . [*Pathetically*] You must admit it is very hard, Geoffrey. Not content with—almost telling me that her—scene this morning was due to me, Betty seems to have succeeded in inspiring Alice with the same idea.

BELASIS. Oh? What has Miss Meyne been saying?

JONES [*very injured indeed*]. Nothing! Nothing that I could get hold of, that is. We've just been chatting in the most—ordinary way, but really I've seldom spent a more uncomfortable quarter of an hour. She seems to base every blessed thing she says on the mutual understanding that Betty's bad language and all the rest of it ought to be forgiven freely in view—well, in view of the fact that she's married to *me*. She was so perfectly convinced that I knew it myself that I found myself agreeing with her. And I tell you, Geoffrey—I valued that girl's esteem very highly.

BELASIS. Perhaps her sense of proportion is warped too.

JONES [*at the stage, where strong men do not weep*]. Geoffrey, you—you are really!—you're inhuman. You don't seem to realize that, unlikely as the whole thing appears, we may see Betty in the dock?

BELASIS. Is that what's worrying you?

JONES. Is that what's worrying me! Good God, man! What do you think is worrying me? She won't apologize. *I* know how obstinate she can be. I tell you, I'm frightened for her.

BELASIS. I'm sorry. I thought what was worrying you was the fact that Betty pleaded justification—or at least extenuating circumstances.

JONES. Well, good Lord, man, *doesn't* that make it ten times worse for me? To feel . . . [*He cannot continue.*

BELASIS [*very quietly*]. I'm afraid you are not the right man to get that apology out of Betty, Ivor. Your desire for it is not—single enough. You are a little mixed, in fact, as to what you want it for. If I understand Betty, she sees this and she resents it. If I were you, I should tell her quite simply that you are frightened for her . . .

JONES. My dear Geoffrey, I've done more than that already.

BELASIS [*with lost significance*]. Quite so. [*He gives up the argument and stretches himself.*] What a gorgeous evening!

JONES [*gloomily*]. The weather has been perfect for months.

[BETTY *and* ALICE *are heard below.*

BETTY. Yes, it is cooler. . . . Ah, but I shall be colder in prison, shan't I, Ivor?

[*This last as she comes on deck followed by* ALICE, *and the two men rise to greet her.*

ALICE [*coming on deck behind her*]. Betty, don't!

BETTY. I want to get used to the idea, Alice. The idea is everything. [*Looking towards the table*] Shall I make you a cup?

BELASIS. Do.

BETTY [*ringing the bell*]. I only hope we've got some ice.

[WOOTON *comes on left.*

WOOTON. You rang, madam?

BETTY. Yes; I want to make a cup. Have we got any ice?

WOOTON. We have, ma'am.

BETTY. Oh, that's good—and a cucumber?

WOOTON. I don't fancy there's a cucumber on board, ma'am, but I've no doubt we can borrow one.

BETTY. All right—try. You know the other things I want.

WOOTON. Yes, ma'am. Er . . . [*He pauses, looking towards* JONES.

JONES. What is it?

[*He places a chair for* BETTY, *who sits.* ALICE *is already seated.*

WOOTON. Mr Wister is not here, is he, sir?

JONES. No. Why?

WOOTON. Mrs Wister's maid has come over to inquire, sir. It seems as Mr Wister has not returned home, and Mrs Wister is asking for him. I told her as he'd left here an hour or more.

JONES [*looking at his watch*]. Oh, yes, quite that.

WOOTON. Thank you, sir. [*Exit left.*

BELASIS. He said he was going to pull up and down a bit longer when he left me.

[BETTY *has dropped curiously out of the conversation. When she is not being deliberately gay or rude in this Act—or at least at the beginning of it—she is singularly quiet and preoccupied.*

ALICE. Poor man!

BELASIS. What sort of a fellow is he when he is less excited than he was to-day?

JONES [*tolerantly*]. Oh, very much the same. A thoroughly well-meaning idiot, you know, but . . .

BELASIS [*thoughtfully*]. Do you know, I should have described him as rather intelligent?

JONES [*surprised*]. Would you?

ALICE [*quietly*] Of course, he is.

BELASIS [*to her*]. You agree with me? Too intelligent, perhaps, I was going to say; blessed with too much insight—he writes, doesn't he?

JONES. Yes.

BELASIS [*nodding*]. He lacks method, but [*turning to his sister*]—he's a great admirer of yours, Betty.

BETTY [*brought suddenly out of her trance*]. Is he? Yes—I know he is . . . [*Pulling herself together.*] When did he tell you so?

BELASIS. Oh, I have been improving his acquaintance! He insisted upon rowing me down to the lock and back when he left here, apparently just to tell me what a wonderful and noble woman you are.

BETTY [*aggressively*]. Are you trying to make me apologize for his sake?

BELASIS [*calmly and tactfully reproving her insinuation*]. No—I'm—er—not. I'm discussing a neighbour of yours who interests me slightly, and mentioning as one of his good points that he admires you.

BETTY [*accepting the reproof in perfect good humour and apologizing with a laugh*]. I'm sorry, Geoffrey. I'm getting as defensive as an old hedgehog. But, really, everybody seems to be attacking me from a different vantage. [*With a genuine laugh*] Alice is the latest!

JONES. Oh? And what is Alice's argument?

BETTY [*scornfully*]. Huh! She wants me to apologize just to show you that I know how to, or something. I didn't quite follow her, I admit.

ALICE [*expostulating*]. That's not fair, Betty. What I said was: You've shown . . . [*She suddenly pulls up and recasts her sentence.*] Well—you've shown that you can be firm; now show that you can give way.

BETTY [*immensely tickled*]. H'm! That isn't exactly what you said, you know.

ALICE. No—but—it's what I meant.

BETTY [*with charming severity*]. Oh, no, Alice! I thought that bit about having punished Ivor enough for what he'd done, was the best thing you said.

[JONES *rises and strolls quietly to the rail right, where he leans with his back to them, looking up the river.* ALICE *watches him, then lowers her voice to include only herself and* BETTY. BELASIS *is not very near them, and he is leaning back in his chair smoking and not listening to them with any attention.*

ALICE [*with real reproach*]. You are a pig, Betty.

BETTY. I know it. But then, you see, I don't think I have punished Ivor enough.

ALICE. Look here, Betty, you know I like you, and you know I think you've had provocation, but if you can't at least behave decently to Colonel Jones in public, I shall go.

BETTY [*looking at her, amused*]. Hity-tity!

ALICE. No, I'm not joking.

BETTY. No, I know you're not. You're a regular little spitfire! Al right. I'll try not to stick pins into him any more than I can help but . . . [*She shuts her mouth expressively*

ALICE [*curiously*]. But what?

BETTY. Oh, nothing! [*Savagely*] He really is a dunderhead, you know. I don't mean only over Muriel, but—ouh!!!

[*The exclamation closes the subject, and almost does justice to it.*

[WOOTON *enters left, bearing the liqueurs and other ingredients for the cup on a large tray, which he carries to the centre table—also a large cut-glass jug.*

WOOTON. The cucumber is not yet to hand, ma'am. Cook is now signalling for it. [*Arranges the ingredients on table.*

BELASIS. Signalling?

JONES. Oh, you have no idea how clever we are on this river.

[BETTY *has risen and now reaches the table above which she stands preparing the hock-cup. The distant gramophone strikes up—a waltz.*

BETTY [*busily engaged*]. Oh, Lord! there's that instrument of torture again!

ALICE. I think it's rather pretty.

BETTY. It depends upon how one feels, I suppose.

JONES [*from the rail*]. Hullo! There's Wister only just going home now.

BETTY. He'll catch it! I really believe Muriel thrashes him, you know, Alice.

ALICE. Don't be silly.

WOOTON [*standing by with the hock*]. Shall I open it now, ma'am?

BETTY. Yes.

WOOTON. Thank you, ma'am, then I . . . [*He wields the corkscrew.*

JONES [*with some surprise, still watching the distant* WISTER]. No, he isn't! He seems to be pulling straight for us!

BELASIS [*rising and going to his side*]. Who? Wister?

JONES. Yes. [*Then between laughter and annoyance*] Good Lord! What's the matter with the man? [*Calling down*] Hi! Don't ram us!

ALICE [*also rising in her place*]. What's he . . .

JONES [*to* BELASIS]. We'd better . . . [*He leads the way, running down the stairs right, calling as he goes*] Hold on where you are!

ALICE [*sitting again and speaking with some curiosity*]. I wonder what he's come back now for?

BETTY [*still above table*]. I don't know, and I don't care.

[WOOTON *exits quietly left.*

ALICE [*looking at her friend curiously*]. What has been happening,

Betty? You were very wicked at teatime, but you weren't—like this. Does poor Colonel Jones really have such a bad effect on you?

BETTY [*grimly*]. *He does!*

ALICE. But why? What does he do?

BETTY. Oh, my dear, you'll have to get married yourself to find out quite how maddening a man can be.

ALICE. But surely your talking like this about going to prison . . .

BETTY [*sharply*]. Talking? I'm not merely talking, my dear. If Muriel likes to take this into court I'll *go* to prison.

ALICE. Just for the pleasure of being a martyr?

BETTY [*candidly after consideration*]. Yes—I believe it would be, *just* for the pleasure of being a martyr. I can just tell how those old martyrs used to go into it. "Damn you!" they said; "you think I'm just making a fuss about a trifle. I'll show you whether it's a trifle or not! I'll—I'll do six months in the second division for it." [*Struck with a fresh idea.*] That's what I suppose the suffragettes said.

ALICE. You're not a suffragette.

BETTY. No. But I'm beginning to understand how people feel when their convictions are described as—"Betty darling, you've lost your sense of proportion."

ALICE. Is that what Colonel Jones says?

BETTY. Yes.

ALICE. How silly of him!

BETTY. There you are! You're goody-goody enough in all conscience, and even you don't think that whether a man's faithful or not matters so enormously that making a *cavaliere servante* and a general idiot of himself doesn't matter at all.

ALICE [*sedately*]. I think they both matter.

BETTY. So do I, damn it! That's where I'm beaten! Oh, Lord, this world and the things we ask of it! [*Breaking down*] Why do we want so much more than food and drink and faithfulness when we can't get even them?

[*The end of this is scarcely coherent. She is on the verge of tears, and has sunk into the chair above the table, putting her elbow thereon and her hand irritably to her eyes.* ALICE *rises and is hurrying to her with a motherly "Hush! hush!" when* WISTER's *voice is heard below apparently expostulating.*

BETTY [*snorting back her tears and rising to her feet*]. Oh, my patience! and here's Teddy Wister again!

ALICE [*soothing her*]. You needn't . . .

[*Apparently she must, though, for* MR WISTER *appears on deck right, followed by* JONES *and* BELASIS. *He stands blinking after the dark of the river.*

WISTER. I say, you have got it light up here. [*Seeing* ALICE, *who*

*is between him and* BETTY] It's Alice, isn't it? [*Shakes hands with her.*] I'm so glad to see you're rallying round poor Betty, Alice. It's . . . fine the way you women hang together. [*Passing her to* BETTY's *side*] Making a cup? [*With a glance towards the dinner-table*] I say, Jones, can I have a . . .

JONES. You can have some lemonade. I shouldn't advise . . .

WISTER. You are quite right! I've had quite enough! One glass more might be just that one glass more that's the one glass too many!

[*N.B.—He is not drunk in the disgusting sense of the word, but several glasses and no food have produced an exaltation which does not accord altogether strangely with his usual enthusiastic and nervous temperament. He is merely himself in excelsis.*

I suppose you're surprised to see me back so soon?

BETTY. Oh, my dear man, I'm past being surprised at anything.

WISTER [*shaking his head in complete comprehension*]. I quite understand you.

[WOOTON *has returned, and now speaks to* JONES *across the lower end of the table.*

WOOTON. Shall I lay a place for Mr Wister, sir?

JONES [*turning, lemonade in hand*]. No.

WOOTON [*persuasively*]. I thought perhaps Mr Wister might be persuaded to stop to dinner, sir.

[JONES *is just opening his mouth to reply with some severity, but* WISTER, *who has overheard, interrupts from right.*

WISTER [*seriously advising*]. I should certainly ask me to stop to dinner if I were you, Jones. Because I should accept, and then, there you are, you've got me. [WOOTON *exits.*

JONES. What do you mean?

WISTER. I know! You think I've been 'phoning to my solicitor. Well, I haven't! I've been pulling up and down the river ever since I left you, making up my mind about it. And I've made up my mind! I won't! I'm not going to! Well, if I stay to dinner after saying that, I shall look very silly if I go back on it when I'm sober, shan't I?

BETTY. When you're sober? Then you're not sober now?

WISTER [*truthfully and simply*]. *In vino veritas*—not quite. Anyway, I shall be soberer to-morrow, and when a man's soberer than he has been, he often thinks he was less sober than he was when he—*wasn't*. I don't want to go back on what I'm going to say. I won't give you any more trouble, Betty. And I'm very sorry—more than sorry—to have come here with threats this afternoon.

[WOOTON *returns and lays a place for* WISTER.

BETTY. Thank you, Teddy. I'm sorry you're not sober, but I'm grateful for small mercies. [LESCELINE *enters with cups of cold consommé.*

WOOTON. Dinner is ready, ma'am. [BETTY *and* ALICE *rise.*

WISTER [*hovering*]. Well, am I going to stay?

BELASIS [*by the rail where he has been since his re-entrance*]. Mr Wister's suggestion is a public olive-branch, Jones.

ALICE [*sotto voce*]. Oh, yes, let him stay.

JONES [*to her*]. Sure you don't mind?

ALICE. Mind? No, poor fellow. You can't send him back to Mrs Wister while he's so excited.

JONES. Well, Wooton seems to have decided for us. Come along, Wister.

[WISTER *crosses to the table.* BELASIS, *crossing behind him, commends the invitation.*

BELASIS. Though of course Mr Wister cannot prevent Mrs Wister proceeding . . . Where do you want to put me, Betty?

BETTY [*touching the left of the table*]. Over here. [ALICE *has gone to the right side of the table,* JONES *to the head—that is, below it, with his back to the audience—and* BETTY *is standing above it.* WISTER *is hovering between centre and the dinner-table. His place is laid between* BETTY *and* ALICE.] Wooton's put you here, Teddy. Sit down. I bet you're more hungry than anything else—aren't you?

WISTER. That's all that's really the matter with me. I didn't have any lunch.

ALICE [*sympathetically*]. Well, then, of course, you poor thing.

[WOOTON, *serving the consommé, comes past foot of table at this moment.* JONES *stops him to say quietly:*

JONES. Mr Wister will drink lemonade, Wooton.

WOOTON [*with a trace of regret*]. Very good, sir.

WISTER [*putting down empty cup*]. That's a very excellent cup of *consommé.*

BETTY [*drily*]. Yes; it happens to be mine.

WISTER [*covered with confusion*]. Oh, dear, I do apologize. How could I . . .

WOOTON. I have another cup here for you, madam.

WISTER. I really do beg your pardon!

BETTY. It's all right; we've only exchanged, that's all.

ALICE. You are awfully wise to eat on deck all you can, Betty.

BETTY. My dear, I'm wiser not to eat down in that saloon. It gives me the cold shivers—like one of those awful oblong restaurants. You know the sort: a door at each end and a long draught with a waiter blowing up and down it.

BELASIS. I should think a draught would be rather pleasant this weather.

[WOOTON *is clearing the cups away and* LESCELINE *takes round the hock-cup.*

BETTY. Yes; it's the general feeling. Oh, well, I suppose I shall be glad to eat anywhere when I come out of prison.

ALICE. Betty! [WOOTON *exits with the cups.*

BETTY. What?

ALICE. Don't keep on about prison like that. Can't you find anything else to talk about?

[WOOTON *returns with lobster mayonnaise and a plate of sliced cucumber.*

WOOTON [*placing the mayonnaise before* JONES]. The cucumber is to hand, ma'am.

[*He intercepts* LESCELINE *with the jug just after she has filled* ALICE'S *glass and tilts the sliced cucumber into it.*

WISTER [*as* LESCELINE *fills his glass*]. Just in time for me—I'm in luck!

WOOTON [*appreciating what's happened*]. Oh, dear!

BETTY [*slightly surprised*]. What's the matter, Wooton?

WOOTON [*hastily*]. Nothing, ma'am. I beg pardon, ma'am.

[*He hurries to bring her her mayonnaise without catching* JONES'S *eye.*

BELASIS [*with a smile*]. Do you always have lobster on the river Betty?

BETTY. Oh, no, we have salmon sometimes; don't we, Alice?

BELASIS. More variety than I thought.

BETTY. They both seem—suitable, somehow—and I like them. I wonder if they'll give me lobster in prison if I'm good?

BELASIS. I doubt it.

BETTY. They could manage me with lobster. What do they feed you on, Geoffrey?

BELASIS. I'm afraid I can't say. You see, I have never been in prison.

BETTY [*gaily*]. Oh, you ought to have been! No, really, I do think a barrister ought to know his profession from the bottom up. Think of the authority it would give you when you came to be a judge to really know what you were giving people.

BELASIS. I suppose you'd think me a wet blanket, Betty, if I offered to lay you a hundred to one in sovereigns that you don't go to prison.

BETTY. What do you mean?

BELASIS. To get you there a good many eventualities will have to come to pass—which look to me very unlikely to do so. Mr Wister is not very likely to proceed against you after this very open reconciliation—and even if he does allow himself to change, the court might be able to muster enough common sense to distinguish between a supper quarrel and a deliberate libel.

WISTER. That's just what I've said over and over again to Muriel.

BETTY. Well, she's an authority. What did she say to it?

WISTER. She said that was where you were so silly not to apologize and prove beyond question that it was just a quarrel and not a deliberate libel.

BETTY. Quite right! I'll take your bet, Geoffrey. The jury will look at it just that way. [WOOTON *exits.*

ALICE. You really shouldn't, Betty. Did you see poor Wooton's face when you were talking about prison food?

JONES. Wooton, like me, is entering late into civilian society and its topics distress him.

BELASIS. Any news of the staff appointment yet?

JONES. No, and there never will be. I shall have to find some hobby like keeping rabbits. [WOOTON *returns and takes around hock-cup.*

WISTER [*enthusiastically*]. You do make the most wonderful hock-cup, Betty. What do you put in it?

BETTY [*twinkling*]. Maraschino; forty-eight brandy; Cointreau—and —er—hock.

WISTER. You're a genius! I *will* have some more, Wooton.

WOOTON [*under compulsion*]. Yes, sir. [*Fills his glass; then, hastening to pass* JONES, *whispers in his ear.*] Very sorry, sir. What was I to do?

WISTER [*on his feet*]. Confusion to the law.

BETTY. Oh, no, Teddy!

WISTER [*firmly*]. Yes. Damn it! [*Drains his glass, standing, and sits.*

BETTY [*to* BELASIS]. I warn you, Geoffrey. Teddy's an awful anarchist!

BELASIS. I have no objection to an anarchist, Betty. It's the animal calling itself progressive that I object to.

ALICE. Good gracious, that's a funny thing to say!

BELASIS. Oh, no. The anarchist is a part of the *status quo.* There have always been anarchists. The progressive is something new and dangerous. He wants to desert the *status quo* and set up another.

WISTER. Are you so devoted to the present state of things?

BELASIS. Oh, no. But I realize that we cannot change them.

WISTER. Can't we?

[WOOTON *removes fish plates and fetches cutlets, etc., which* JONES *helps and* WOOTON *and* LESCELINE *take around, serving vegetables, etc.*

BELASIS [*shaking his head*]. No, no.

WISTER. They've been changed a few times.

BELASIS. Not since civilization began, believe me.

ALICE. How can you say that with all this progress?

BELASIS. All what progress?

ALICE. Well—telephones—motors.

BELASIS. We mean different things by progress, Miss Meyne. As I read it, history reveals the fact that there has been no real progress for at least six thousand years.

ALICE. Oh, good gracious!

BELASIS. No, really. Something like six thousand years ago ten commandments were framed, embodying the sum-total of man's moral desires: to be just, to be honest, to be pure, to be truthful, *et cetera, et cetera.* Six thousand years have elapsed and he has neither achieved those desires, nor—which is much more significant of his moral stagnation—has he added one solitary ideal to their number. If by means of the telephone or the motor, man had drawn a little nearer to his moral code his progress would be obvious; if he had by refinement of mind, by thought, by experiment, enunciated a single fresh tenet, his progress, though less apparent, would be even more real, but since he has done neither, man must be regarded as a stationary being for whom the preservation of the *status quo* is the only safeguard against falling back, since it is established beyond question that he cannot move forward.

BETTY [*with sisterly sarcasm*]. Poor man!

WISTER [*surprisingly excited*]. You're right, Betty! I was just going to say the same thing myself. [*Leaning across and beating out his emphasis on the table*] *How about woman?*

BELASIS [*astonished at his opponent's excitement*]. I—er . . .

WISTER [*repeating it*]. How about woman? You say man has neither lived up to his moral code nor enlarged it. Granted. But how about woman? I don't say she's lived up to it either, but then perhaps she doesn't like it. She didn't make it. But she *has* added to it, and, as you yourself say, that argues more moral sense than just following what's already been laid down. It's *active* morality. That's what women are—they are *actively* moral! Look at the activity of Betty's Moral Perception! Look at the sincerity of it! The conviction! She'd go through the law-courts rather than deny her expression of abhorrence of Jones shopping for my wife! Isn't that a new moral idea?—fresh evolved? And, mind you, it's a sound one! It awakens an answering throb in me! So it does in you, Alice! We *feel* that a new moral tenet has been established. It *is* wrong for a grown man to run errands all day for his neighbour's wife! It's revolting!! It isn't as if you'd just done it once, Jones—you were always doing it. Muriel had you absolutely under her thumb! Betty *saw* the immorality of that. She didn't have to think it out, she saw it. Something said to her "It isn't right—it's wrong"!!!! That was her moral sense—active—evolving!!

[*To* BELASIS] You say there's been no moral progress! Can you imagine an early Victorian wife making herself ill because her husband

made an ass of himself like Jones has done? No!! So long as he was faithful to her and kind to her, what did she care? It's only the modern woman who has reached such a pitch of ab—*abstraction*. That's what it is! Super-material abstraction!!! We sneer at modern women and call them superfish—superficial; it's because they soar too high for us. Spiritual detestation of the mundane world, that's what their superficiality is. They spurn the sordid depths! We call them artificial and accuse them of acting—so they do! They *do* act! They mean to be superficial! It's their idealism. All idealism is artificial. It's consciousness of the desire to ascend to a plane that does not yet exist. Very well! It has to be artificially manufactured.

Women have raised themselves a tremendous distance already. Look how immaterially we speak about them. You never talk about a modern woman's physique, do you? No; you talk about her charm. Abstract!! Abstract!!! You don't mind whether she is beautiful or not—is she smart? Abstract again!!! You think of her complexion, not her face, her figure, not her body—I tell you, women are the real æsthetics!! What do they care for their natural, material shapes? They must have the ideal curve or line that expresses the inner consciousness at the moment, and they will suffer *pain* to get it!!! The curve is the expression of the spirit—evolving—changing!! The body —they are born with it—it's a material fetter!!! That's how women feel towards all physical things! That's why they don't demand from their husbands the mere physical fidelity that he wants them to insist upon. The modern woman is above minding mere physical unfaithfulness—unless it becomes public—which, of course, endows it with spiritual significance by exposing her to ridicule. That's what she demands from him: self-respect—sensitiveness to ridicule. How sublime!!! Ridicule is the appreciation of something being out of place. It is essentially a spiritual feeling; the expression of that sense of order by which the spirit controls matter. There you are! Sensitiveness to spiritual condemnation, that's what woman asks of her husband. And does he appreciate the beauty of her demand? No!! He calls her superficial because she cannot sink to his base and ignoble morality. [*Solemnly*] Betty! Long may you remain superficial! Lifting the world to fresh planes of refinement and beauty far above the sordid materialism of Jones! [*He sits with great dignity.*

Jones [*very quietly and matter-of-factly after a pause*]. Well, now, Geoffrey, will you go and drive the boats away, or shall I?

Belasis. What do you mean?

Jones. Well, I should estimate the crowd around our houseboat at about two hundred by this time. I quite expected to hear applause when the oration ended. [*Rising*] Is your boat below, Wister?

Wister. I left it there.

JONES. Of course. Well, now, don't you think you'd better get into it and go home and have a nap?

WISTER [*rising*]. I will go if you wish. But I prefer to pull up and down for a—while.

BETTY [*to* JONES]. He mustn't . . .

JONES [*quietly to her*]. Of course not. Would you mind if Geoffrey and I left you to finish alone?

ALICE. No.

JONES. Come along, Geoffrey. We'll see him home.

[*They escort* WISTER, *who seems tired, down the stairs to right. Left alone,* BETTY *and* ALICE *sit quietly in their places.* WOOTON *serves ices and withdraws.*

BETTY. Well, Alice, what are you thinking about?

ALICE. I . . . nothing . . . Why?

BETTY. You smiled.

ALICE [*amazed*]. Did I?

BETTY. No, perhaps you didn't. Perhaps I only expected you to smile.

ALICE. Why? [JONES *returns, crossing rapidly to table*

JONES. I want a strong knife. Wister has tied his boat up like a . . .

[*He takes one up and turns away.*

BETTY. Ivor!

[*He turns back to find her with her hand outstretched on the table towards him. He stands looking at her.*

JONES. What is it?

BETTY. I want to talk to you.

ALICE [*rising*]. Shall I go?

BETTY. You can do something for me if you will, Alice.

ALICE. Of course I will. . . . What is it?

BETTY. Bring me up a letter you'll find on the . . . No, it's in my writing-case. Bring me up the whole thing, will you?

ALICE. Of course I will, dear. [ALICE *exits right.*

BETTY [*after a pause, during which she has studied her husband's face quizzically*]. Well, Ivor, how do you like being married to a pillar of the new morality?

JONES. The what?

BETTY. You heard what Teddy said.

JONES. I'm afraid I didn't follow him very closely.

BETTY. Oh, why not? He spoke really very highly of me.

JONES. He was drunk.

BETTY. Yes, that's a pity, isn't it? Still, he understands me much better than you do. He knows me to be an abstract, high-souled, non-material creature, impervious to anything but ridicule, while you think me—just a woman. Aren't you glad you're wrong?

JONES [*more and more puzzled*]. What are you getting at?

BETTY [*obligingly*]. Well, would you rather be right? It wouldn't be difficult. I nearly followed up that past of yours and broke my heart over it in a most womanly and material way.

[ALICE *comes on deck.* BETTY *turns to her and takes the case.*

BETTY. Thank you, Alice. [ALICE *exits again right.*

BETTY [*opening her case and taking out a letter*]. Listen, Ivor. [*Reads.*] "Dear Mrs Wister,—Since raising objections to my husband fetching hairpins for you, he has informed me that he is not quite perfect. This blow having restored my sense of proportion, I beg to apologize and withdraw all objection to . . ."

JONES. Oh, Betty!

BETTY. Well, that was the lever you used.

JONES. Yes, but . . .

BETTY. But you don't like it put so plainly? I quite understand. Well, we'll put the other side plainly too. [*Dogmatically*] Ivor, I am an idealist—I detest the mundane world. I don't care how unfaithful you are to me, but you must not make yourself ridiculous. Now, then. Which will you have?

JONES. Which?

BETTY. Yes. Which shall I be, the [*waves letter*] or . . .

JONES. Neither.

BETTY. Neither? Oh, Ivor, don't you want me to care about you at all?

JONES. No, I don't mean that. Both.

BETTY. Both! A jealous materialist, *and* an exacting idealist? Oh, Ivor, I'm glad you want both, because I'm afraid that's what you've got! [*Suddenly she changes her tone, holding out her hands to him.*] Dearest . . . that ghastly past upsets me very much, but the silly present upsets me too. I want—as many perfections . . . [*Suddenly, quaintly*] Well, I suppose I want all I can get.

JONES [*appreciating the humorous turn she is giving to it*]. I'll do what I can for you. [*He kisses her hand.*

[*From below comes a loud splash and a faint shout.*

JONES [*turning and moving towards it*]. Hullo, what's . . .

BELASIS [*merely putting his head above the deck's edge, right*]. The orator has fallen into the water.

BETTY [*laughing*]. Fish him out, please. We want him to take a note to Muriel. Don't we Ivor?

[*She opens her case and selects a sheet of paper*

# THE CIRCLE

## By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

*First produced at the Haymarket Theatre, London, March* 3, 1921

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

| | |
|---|---|
| Lord Porteous | Edward Luton |
| Clive Champion-Cheney | Mrs Shenstone |
| Arnold Champion-Cheney, M.P. | Elizabeth |
| Lady Catherine Champion-Cheney | Butler |
| | Footman |

*The scene is in the drawing-room at Aston-Adey, Arnold Champion-Cheney's house in Dorset.*

Act I. *Morning.*
Act II. *The afternoon, two days later.*
Act III. *Evening, the same day.*

MR SOMERSET MAUGHAM began extraordinarily, with the realistic novel *'Liza of Lambeth*, written when he was still a medical student, and, as playwright, with a play written in German and produced in Berlin. *A Man of Honour* (1903) appeared to indicate for its author the career of a serious and tragic playwright. It had merely a success of esteem, but in 1908, with four plays of lighter type running simultaneously, Mr Maugham began signally to experience the popularity which has rarely deserted him. That is, of course, only another way of saying that he is a craftsman of rare competence (for example, *Lady Frederick* and *The Land of Promise*), and had he travelled no farther than that it might have been deemed unnecessary to represent him in this book. Mr Maugham did travel farther, and his 1915 novel *Of Human Bondage* (of which the significance was more rapidly recognized in America than in England) seemed to hold promise that he might as a playwright advance as he had advanced as a novelist. The farce *Home and Beauty* was, besides being good fun, a scathing satire upon divorce procedure, but two serious comedies of Mr Maugham's post-War theatre stand out definitely—viz., *The Circle* and *Our Betters*.

*Our Betters* has a surface which glitters like a diamond; it is cold and

hard as diamond; and, in a sense, it is a fecund play, because, by passing it for public performance, the Lord Chamberlain disclosed a broadening of the official mind which has clearly influenced later drama. *The Circle*, which Mr Maugham prefers to *Our Betters*, contains a fine, possibly the finest, example of a serious modern love-scene, stripped bare of sentiment. The theme is modern love;

> The actors are, it seems, the usual three:
> Husband, and wife, and lover. She—but fie!
> In England we'll not hear of it.

So Meredith wrote, but the times are changed. The candid treatment of love is no longer taboo, either in novels or on the stage.

Three pieces of Mr Maugham's fiction have been dramatized—*The Letter*, by himself, the novel *The Moon and Sixpence*, and the long-short story *Sadie Thompson* (*Rain*), by other hands. Even the close guard which French nationalism keeps upon its theatre failed to exclude *Rain* from Paris.

# ACT I

SCENE: *The scene is a stately drawing-room at Aston-Adey, with fine pictures on the walls, and Georgian furniture. Aston-Adey has been described, with many illustrations, in "Country Life." It is not a house, but a place. Its owner takes a great pride in it, and there is nothing in the room which is not of the period. Through the French windows at the back can be seen the beautiful gardens which are one of the features.*

*It is a fine summer morning.*

ARNOLD [*off stage—calling*]. Elizabeth! Elizabeth!

[ARNOLD *comes in. He is a man of about thirty-five, tall and good-looking, fair, with a clean-cut, sensitive face. He has a look that is intellectual, but somewhat bloodless. He is very well dressed. He rings the bell; while he is waiting, he gives a look round the room. He slightly alters the position of one of the chairs. He takes an ornament from the chimney-piece and blows the dust from it. A* FOOTMAN *comes in door up right.*

FOOTMAN. Yes, sir?

ARNOLD. Oh, George, see if you can find Mrs Cheney, and ask her if she'd be good enough to come here.

FOOTMAN. Very good, sir. [*The* FOOTMAN *turns to go.*

ARNOLD. George, who is supposed to look after this room?

FOOTMAN. I don't know, sir.

ARNOLD. I wish, when they dust, they'd take care to replace the things exactly as they were before.

FOOTMAN. Yes, sir. [*Pause.*

ARNOLD [*dismissing him*]. All right. [*The* FOOTMAN *goes out.*

[*He goes again out to window right and along balcony to left. Calls:*

Elizabeth! Elizabeth!

[MRS SHENSTONE *comes in from the garden up right. She is a woman of forty; pleasant and of elegant appearance.*

[*He sees* MRS SHENSTONE.] Oh, Anna, do you know where Elizabeth is?

ANNA. Isn't she playing tennis?

ARNOLD. No, I've been down to the tennis-court. Something very tiresome has happened.

The acting rights of this play are reserved. Applications regarding amateur performances should be addressed to Mr R. Golding Bright, 20 Green Street, Leicester Square, London, W.C.2.

ANNA. Oh?

ARNOLD. I wonder where the deuce she is.

[*Opens double doors right.*

ANNA. When do you expect Lord Porteous and Lady Kitty?

ARNOLD. They're motoring down in time for luncheon.

ANNA. Are you sure you want me to be here? It's not too late yet, you know. I can have my things packed and catch a train for somewhere or other.

ARNOLD. No; of course we want you. It'll make it so much easier if there are people here. [ANNA *sits in settee left.*] It was exceedingly kind of you to come.

ANNA. Oh, nonsense!

ARNOLD. And I think it was a good thing to have Teddie Luton down.

ANNA. He is so breezy, isn't he?

ARNOLD. Yes, that's his great asset. I don't know that he's very intelligent, but, you know, there are occasions when you want a bull in a china shop. I sent one of the servants to find Elizabeth.

[*Again opens doors right.*

ANNA. I dare say she's putting on her shoes. She and Teddie were going to have a single.

ARNOLD. It can't take all this time to change one's shoes.

ANNA [*with a smile*]. One can't change one's shoes without powdering one's nose, you know.

[ELIZABETH *comes in from garden right. She is a very pretty creature in the early twenties. She wears a light summer frock. She carries a tennis-racquet.*

ARNOLD. My dear, I've been hunting for you everywhere. What *have* you been doing?

ELIZABETH. Nothing. I've been standing on my head.

ARNOLD. My father's here.

ELIZABETH [*startled*]. Where?

ARNOLD. At the cottage. He arrived last night.

ELIZABETH. Damn!

ARNOLD [*good-humouredly*]. I wish you wouldn't say that, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. If you're not going to say damn when a thing's damnable, when are you going to say damn?

ARNOLD. I should have thought you could say "Oh, bother!" or something like that.

ELIZABETH. But that wouldn't express my sentiments. Besides, at that speech-day, when you were giving away the prizes, you said there were no synonyms in the English language.

ANNA [*smiling*]. Oh, Elizabeth, it's very unfair to expect a politician to live in private up to the statements he makes in public.

ARNOLD. I am always perfectly willing to stand by anything I've said. There *are* no synonyms in the English language.

ELIZABETH. In that case, I shall be regretfully forced to continue to say damn whenever I feel like it.

[EDWARD LUTON *shows himself at the window. He is an attractive youth, in flannels; carries racquet and box of balls.*

TEDDIE. I say, what about this tennis?

ELIZABETH [*sits on stool right*]. Come in. We're having a scene.

TEDDIE [*entering*]. How splendid! What about?

ELIZABETH. The English language.

TEDDIE. Don't tell me you've been splitting your infinitives.

ARNOLD [*with the shade of a frown*]. I wish you'd be serious, Elizabeth. The situation is none too pleasant.

ANNA. I think Teddie and I had better make ourselves scarce.

[*Rises.*

ELIZABETH. Nonsense! [ANNA *sits.*] You're both in it. If there's going to be any unpleasantness, we want your moral support. That's why we asked you to come.

TEDDIE. And I thought I'd been asked for my brown eyes.

ELIZABETH. Vain beast! And they happen to be blue.

TEDDIE. Is anything up?

ELIZABETH. Arnold's father arrived last night.

TEDDIE. Did he, by Jove? I thought he was in Paris.

ARNOLD. So did we all. He told me he'd be there for the next month.

ANNA. Have you seen him?

ARNOLD. No; he rang me up. It's a mercy we had a telephone put in the cottage. [TEDDIE *sits on table right.*] It would have been a pretty kettle of fish if he'd just walked in.

ELIZABETH. Did you tell him Lady Catherine was coming?

ARNOLD. Of course not. I was too flabbergasted to know he was here. And then I thought we'd better talk it over first.

ELIZABETH. Is he coming along now?

ARNOLD. Yes. He suggested it, and I couldn't think of any excuse to prevent him.

TEDDIE. Couldn't you put the other people off?

ARNOLD. They're coming by car. They may be here any minute. It's too late to do that.

ELIZABETH. Besides, it would be beastly.

ARNOLD. I know it was silly asking them down. Elizabeth insisted.

ELIZABETH. After all, she *is* your mother, Arnold.

ARNOLD. That meant precious little to her when she—went away. You can't imagine it means very much to me now.

ELIZABETH. It's thirty years ago. It seems so absurd to bear malice after all that time.

ARNOLD. I don't bear malice, but the fact remains that she did me the most irreparable harm. I can find no excuse for her.

ELIZABETH. Have you ever tried to?

ARNOLD. My dear Elizabeth, it's no good going over all that again. The facts are lamentably simple. She had a husband who adored her; a wonderful position, all the money she could want, and a child of five. And she ran away with a married man.

ELIZABETH. Lady Porteous is not a very attractive woman, Arnold. [*To* ANNA] Do you know her?

ANNA [*smiling*]. Forbidding is the word, I think.

ARNOLD. If you're going to make little jokes about it, I have nothing more to say.

ANNA. I'm sorry, Arnold.

ELIZABETH. Perhaps your mother couldn't help herself. If she was in love.

ARNOLD. And had no sense of honour, duty, or decency? Oh, yes, under those circumstances you can find plenty of excuses for her.

ELIZABETH. That's not a very pretty way to speak of your mother.

ARNOLD. I cannot look upon her as my mother.

ELIZABETH. What you can't get over is, that she didn't think of you. Some of us are more mother and some of us more woman. It gives me a little thrill when I think that she loved that man so much. She sacrificed her name, her position, and her child to him.

ARNOLD. You really can't expect the said child to have any great affection for the mother who treated him like that.

ELIZABETH. No, I don't think I do. But I think it's a pity after all these years that you shouldn't be friends.

ARNOLD. I wonder if you realize what it was to grow up under the shadow of that horrible scandal. Everywhere: at school, and at Oxford, and afterwards in London, I was always the son of Lady Kitty Cheney. Oh, it was cruel, cruel!

ELIZABETH. Yes, I know, Arnold. It was beastly for you.

ARNOLD. It would have been bad enough if it had been an ordinary case, but the position of the people made it ten times worse. My father was in the House then, and Porteous too, he was Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, and he was very much in the public eye.

ANNA. My father always used to say he was the ablest man in the party. Every one was expecting him to be Prime Minister.

ARNOLD. You can imagine what a boon it was to the British public. They hadn't had such a treat for a generation. The most popular song of the day was about my mother. Did you ever hear it? "Naughty Lady Kitty." "Thought it such a pity." . . .

ELIZABETH [*interrupting*]. Oh, Arnold, don't.

ARNOLD. And then they never let people forget them. If they'd lived quietly in Florence and not made a fuss the scandal would have died down. But those constant actions between Lord and Lady Porteous kept on reminding every one.

TEDDIE. What were they having actions about?

ARNOLD. Of course, my father divorced his wife, but Lady Porteous refused to divorce Porteous. He tried to force her by refusing to support her and turning her out of her house, and heaven knows what. They were constantly wrangling in the law-courts.

ANNA. I think it was monstrous of Lady Porteous.

ARNOLD. She knew he wanted to marry my mother, and she hated my mother. You can't blame her.

ANNA. It must have been very difficult for them.

ARNOLD. That's why they've lived in Florence. Porteous has money. They found people there who were willing to accept the situation.

ELIZABETH. This is the first time they've ever been to England.

ARNOLD. My father will have to be told, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. Yes.

ANNA [*to* ELIZABETH]. Has he ever spoken to you about Lady Kitty?

ELIZABETH. Never.

ARNOLD. I don't think her name has passed his lips since she ran away from this house thirty years ago.

TEDDIE. Oh, they lived here?

ARNOLD. Naturally. There was a house-party, and one evening neither Porteous nor my mother came down to dinner. The rest of them waited. They couldn't make it out. My father sent up to my mother's room, and a note was found on the pin-cushion.

ELIZABETH [*with a faint smile*]. That's what they did in the Dark Ages.

ARNOLD. I think he took a dislike to this house from that horrible night. He never lived here again, and when I married he handed the place over to me. He just has a cottage now on the estate that he comes to when he feels inclined.

ELIZABETH. It's been very nice for us.

ARNOLD. I owe everything to my father. I don't think he'll ever forgive me for asking these people down.

ELIZABETH. I'm going to take all the blame on myself, Arnold.

ARNOLD [*irritably*]. The situation was embarrassing enough, anyhow. I don't know how I ought to treat them.

ELIZABETH. Don't you think that'll settle itself when you see them?

ARNOLD. After all, they are my guests. I shall try and behave like a gentleman.

ELIZABETH. I wouldn't. We haven't got central heating.

ARNOLD [*taking no notice*]. Will she expect me to kiss her?

ELIZABETH [*with a smile*]. Surely.

ARNOLD. It always makes me nervous when people are demonstrative.

ANNA. But I cannot understand why you never saw her before.

ARNOLD. I believe she tried to see me when I was a child, but my father thought it better she shouldn't.

ANNA. Yes, but when you were grown up?

ARNOLD. She was always in Italy. I was never in Italy.

ELIZABETH. It seems to me so pathetic that, if you saw one another in the street, you wouldn't recognize each other.

ARNOLD. Is it my fault?

ELIZABETH. You've promised to be very gentle with her and very kind.

ARNOLD. The mistake was asking Porteous to come too. It looks as though we condoned the whole thing. And how am I to treat *him*? Am I to shake him by the hand and slap him on the back? He absolutely ruined my father's life.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. What would you give for a nice motor accident that prevented them from coming?

ARNOLD. I let you persuade me, against my better judgment, and I've regretted it ever since.

ELIZABETH [*good-humouredly*]. I think it's very lucky that Anna and Teddie are here. I don't foresee a very successful party.

[ANNA *rises and goes behind settee.*

ARNOLD. I'm going to do my best. I gave my promise, and I shall keep it. But I can't answer for my father.

ANNA. Here is your father.

[MR CHAMPION-CHENEY *passes windows from left to right, and stands at the French windows right.*

CLIVE. May I come in through the window, or shall I have myself announced by a supercilious flunkey?

ELIZABETH [*goes up to him*]. Come in. We've been expecting you.

CLIVE. Impatiently, I hope. [*Kisses her.*] My dear child.

[MR CHAMPION-CHENEY *is a tall man, in the early sixties, spare, with a fine head of grey hair and an intelligent, somewhat ascetic face. He is very carefully dressed. He is a man who makes the most of himself. He bears his years jauntily.*

ELIZABETH. We thought you'd be in Paris for another month.

CLIVE. How are you, Arnold? I always reserve to myself the privilege of changing my mind. It's the only one elderly gentlemen share with pretty women.

ELIZABETH. You know Anna?

CLIVE [*shaking hands with her*]. Of course I do. How very nice to see you here! Are you staying long?

ANNA. As long as I'm welcome.

ELIZABETH. And this is Mr Luton. [TEDDIE *crosses to him.*

CLIVE [*shakes hands*]. How do you do? Do you play bridge?

TEDDIE. I do.

CLIVE. Capital. Do you declare without top honours?

TEDDIE. Never.

CLIVE. Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. I see that you are a good young man.

TEDDIE. But, like the good in general, I am poor.

CLIVE. Never mind, if your principles are right, you can play ten shillings a hundred without danger. I never play less and I never play more.

ARNOLD. Are you—are you going to stay long, Father?

CLIVE. To luncheon, if you'll have me.

[ARNOLD *gives* ELIZABETH *a harassed look.*

ELIZABETH. That'll be jolly.

ARNOLD. I didn't mean that. I meant, are you staying down here long?

CLIVE. A week.

[*Goes up, puts down hat and stick on table centre, and then round to fireplace left.*

[*There is a moment's pause. Every one but* CHAMPION-CHENEY *is slightly embarrassed, and looks from one to the other.*

TEDDIE. I think we'd better chuck our tennis.

ELIZABETH. Yes. I want my father-in-law to tell me what they are wearing in Paris this week.

TEDDIE. I'll put the racquets away, shall I?

[TEDDIE *goes out door up right, with racquets and box.* CLIVE *watching him.*

ARNOLD. It's nearly one o'clock, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I didn't know it was so late.

[ARNOLD *looks at* ELIZABETH—*then at* CLIVE.

ANNA [*to* ARNOLD]. I wonder if I can persuade you to take a turn in the garden before luncheon.

ARNOLD [*jumping at the idea*]. I'd love it. [ANNA *goes out of the window left, and as he follows her he stops irresolutely.*] Father, I want to—I want to show you this chair I've just bought. I think it's rather good.

CLIVE [*at fireplace*]. Charming.

ARNOLD. About 1750, I should say. Good design, isn't it? It hasn't been restored or anything.

CLIVE. Very pretty.

ARNOLD. I think it was a good buy, don't you?

CLIVE. Oh, my dear boy, you know I'm entirely ignorant about these things.

ARNOLD. It's exactly my period. . . . I shall see you at luncheon, then. [*He goes out through the window, left.*

CLIVE. Who is that young man? [*Pointing to door right.*

ELIZABETH. Mr Luton? He's only just been demobilized. [*Goes to him.*] He's the manager of a rubber estate in the F.M.S.

CLIVE. And what are the "F.M.S." when they're at home?

ELIZABETH. The Federated Malay States. He joined up at the beginning of the War. He's just going back there.

CLIVE [*looks round*]. And why have we been left alone in this very marked manner?

ELIZABETH. Have we? I didn't notice it.

CLIVE. I suppose it's difficult for the young to realize that one may be old without being a fool.

ELIZABETH. I never thought you that. Every one knows you're very intelligent.

CLIVE. They certainly ought to by now. I've told them often enough. Are you a little nervous?

ELIZABETH. Let me feel my pulse. [*She puts her finger on her wrist.*] It's perfectly regular.

CLIVE. When I suggested staying to luncheon Arnold looked exactly like a dose of castor oil.

ELIZABETH. I wish you'd sit down.

CLIVE. Will it make it easier for you? [*He takes a chair.*] You have evidently something very disagreeable to say to me.

ELIZABETH. You won't be cross with me?

CLIVE. How old are you?

ELIZABETH. Twenty-five.

CLIVE. I'm never cross with a woman under thirty.

ELIZABETH. Oh, then I've got ten years.

CLIVE. Mathematics?

ELIZABETH. No. Paint.

CLIVE. Well?

ELIZABETH [*reflectively*]. I think it would be easier if I sat on your knee.

CLIVE. That is a pleasing taste of yours—[*she sits*] but you must take care not to put on weight.

ELIZABETH. Am I boney?

CLIVE. On the contrary. I'm listening.

ELIZABETH. Lady Catherine's coming here.

CLIVE. Who's Lady Catherine?

ELIZABETH. Your—Arnold's mother.

CLIVE. Is she?

[*He withdraws himself a little, and* ELIZABETH *gets up.*

ELIZABETH. You mustn't blame Arnold. It's my fault. I insisted. He was against it. I nagged him till he gave way. And then I wrote and asked her to come.

CLIVE. I didn't know you knew her.

ELIZABETH. I don't. But I heard she was in London. She's staying at Claridge's. It seemed so heartless not to take the smallest notice of her.

CLIVE. When is she coming?

ELIZABETH. We're expecting her in time for luncheon.

CLIVE. As soon as that? I understand the embarrassment.

ELIZABETH. You see, we never expected you to be here. You said you'd be in Paris for another month.

CLIVE. My dear child, this is your house. There's no reason why you shouldn't ask whom you please to stay with you.

ELIZABETH. After all, whatever her faults, she's Arnold's mother. It seemed so unnatural that they should never see one another. My heart ached for that poor lonely woman.

CLIVE. I never heard that she was lonely, and she certainly isn't poor. [*Pause.*

ELIZABETH. And there's something else.

CLIVE. Oh!

ELIZABETH. I couldn't ask her by herself. It would have been so—so insulting. I asked Lord Porteous too.

CLIVE. I see.

ELIZABETH. I dare say you'd rather not meet them.

CLIVE [*rises*]. I dare say they'd rather not meet me. I shall get a capital luncheon at the cottage. I've noticed you always get the best food if you come in unexpectedly and have the same as they're having in the servants' hall.

ELIZABETH. No one's ever spoken to me about Lady Kitty. It's always been a subject that every one has avoided. I've never even seen a photograph of her.

CLIVE. The house was full of them when she left. I think I told the butler to throw them in the dustbin. She was very much photographed.

ELIZABETH. Won't you tell me what she was like?

CLIVE. She was very like you, Elizabeth, only she had dark hair instead of red.

ELIZABETH. It must be quite white now, poor dear.

CLIVE. I dare say. She was a pretty little thing.

ELIZABETH. But she was one of the great beauties of her day. They say she was lovely.

CLIVE. She had the most adorable little nose, like yours. . . .

ELIZABETH. D'you like my nose?

CLIVE. And she was very dainty, with a beautiful little figure; very light on her feet. She was like a *marquise* in an old French comedy. Yes, she was lovely.

ELIZABETH. And I'm sure she's lovely still.

CLIVE. She's no chicken, you know.

ELIZABETH [*sits on stool*]. You can't expect me to look at it as you and Arnold do. When you've loved as she's loved you may grow old, but you grow old beautifully.

CLIVE. You're very romantic.

ELIZABETH. If every one hadn't made such a mystery of it, I dare say I shouldn't feel as I do. I know she did a great wrong to you and a great wrong to Arnold. I'm willing to acknowledge that.

CLIVE. I'm sure it's very kind of you.

ELIZABETH. But she loved and she dared. Romance is such an illusive thing. You read of it in books, but it's seldom you see it face to face. I can't help it if it thrills me.

CLIVE. I am painfully aware that the husband in these cases is not a romantic object.

ELIZABETH. She had the world at her feet. You were rich. She was a figure in Society. And she gave up everything for love.

CLIVE [*going towards her, drily*]. I'm beginning to suspect it wasn't only for her sake and for Arnold's that you asked her to come here.

ELIZABETH. I seem to know her already. I think her face is a little sad, for love like that doesn't leave you gay; it leaves you grave; but I think her pale face is unlined. It's like a child's.

CLIVE. My dear, how you let your imagination run away with you!

ELIZABETH. I imagine her slight and frail.

CLIVE. Frail, certainly.

ELIZABETH. With beautiful thin hands and white hair. I've pictured her so often in that Renaissance palace where they live, with Old Masters on the walls, and lovely carved things all round, sitting in a black silk dress with old lace round her neck and old-fashioned diamonds. You see, I never knew my mother; she died when I was a baby. You can't confide in aunts with huge families of their own. I want Arnold's mother to be a mother to me. I've got so much to say to her.

CLIVE [*touches her shoulder*]. Are you happy with Arnold?

ELIZABETH. Why shouldn't I be?

CLIVE. Why haven't you got babies?

ELIZABETH. Give us a little time. We've only been married three years.

CLIVE. I wonder what Hughie is like now. [*Goes up for hat, etc.*

ELIZABETH [*rises*]. Lord Porteous?

CLIVE. He wore his clothes better than any man in London. You know, he'd have been Prime Minister if he'd remained in politics.

ELIZABETH. What was he like, then?

CLIVE. He was a nice-looking fellow. Fine horseman. I suppose there was something very fascinating about him. Yellow hair and blue eyes, you know. He had a very good figure. I liked him. I was his Parliamentary secretary. He was Arnold's godfather.

ELIZABETH. I know.

CLIVE. I wonder if he ever regrets.

ELIZABETH. I wouldn't.

CLIVE [*goes up left*]. Well, I must be strolling back to my cottage.

ELIZABETH. You're not angry with me? [*Goes up to him.*

CLIVE. Not a bit.

[*She puts up her face for him to kiss. He kisses her and then goes out.*

[*In a moment* TEDDIE *is seen at the window right. She comes down left and sits in settee.*

TEDDIE. I saw the old blighter go.

ELIZABETH. Come in.

TEDDIE [*comes down centre*]. Everything all right?

ELIZABETH. Oh, quite, as far as he's concerned. He's going to keep out of the way.

TEDDIE. Was it beastly?

ELIZABETH. No; he made it very easy for me. He's a nice old thing.

TEDDIE. You were rather scared.

ELIZABETH. A little. I am, still. I don't know why.

TEDDIE. I guessed you were. I thought I'd come and give you a little moral support. [*Sits.*] It's ripping here, isn't it?

ELIZABETH. It is rather nice.

TEDDIE. It'll be jolly to think of it when I'm back in the F.M.S.

ELIZABETH. Aren't you homesick sometimes?

TEDDIE. Oh, every one is now and then, you know.

ELIZABETH. You could have got a job in England if you'd wanted to, couldn't you?

TEDDIE. Oh, but I love it out there. England's ripping to come back to, but I couldn't live here now. It is like a woman you're desperately in love with as long as you don't see her, but when you're with her she maddens you so that you can't bear her.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. What's wrong with England?

TEDDIE. I don't think anything's wrong with England. I expect something's wrong with me. I've been away too long. England seems to me full of people doing things they don't want to, because other people expect it of them.

ELIZABETH. Isn't that what you call a high degree of civilization?

TEDDIE. People seem to me so insincere. When you go to parties in London, they're all babbling about art, and you feel that, in their hearts, they don't care twopence about it. They read the books that everybody is talking about, because they don't want to be out of it. In the F.M.S. we don't get very many books, and we read those we have over and over again. They mean so much to us. I don't think the people over there are half so clever as the people at home, but one gets to know them better. You see, there are so few of us that we have to make the best of one another.

ELIZABETH. I imagine that frills are not much worn in the F.M.S. It must be a comfort.

TEDDIE. It's not much good being pretentious where every one knows exactly who you are and what your income is.

ELIZABETH. I don't think you want too much sincerity in Society. It would be like an iron girder in a house of cards.

TEDDIE. And then, you know, the place is ripping. You get used to a blue sky, and you miss it in England.

ELIZABETH. What do you do with yourself all the time?

TEDDIE. Oh, one works like blazes. You have to be a pretty hefty fellow to be a planter. And then, you know, there's ripping bathing. Oh, it's lovely, with palm-trees all along the beach. And there's shooting. And now and then we have a little dance to a gramophone.

ELIZABETH [*pretending to tease him*]. I believe you've got a young woman out there, Teddie.

TEDDIE [*vehemently*]. No!

[*She is a little taken aback by the earnestness of his disclaimer. There is a moment's silence, then she recovers herself.*

ELIZABETH. But you'll have to marry and settle down one of these days, you know.

TEDDIE. I want to, but it's not a thing you can do lightly.

ELIZABETH. I don't know why there more than elsewhere.

TEDDIE. In England, if people don't get on, they go their own ways and jog along after a fashion. In a place like that you're thrown a great deal on your own resources.

ELIZABETH. Of course.

TEDDIE. Lots of girls come out because they think they're going to have a good time. But if they're empty-headed then they're just faced with their own emptiness and they're done. If their husbands can afford it they go home and settle down as grass-widows.

ELIZABETH. I've met them. They seem to find it a very pleasant occupation.

TEDDIE. It's rotten for their husbands, though.

ELIZABETH. And if the husbands can't afford it?

TEDDIE. Oh, then they tipple.

ELIZABETH. It's not a very alluring prospect.

TEDDIE. But if the woman's the right sort, she wouldn't exchange it for any life in the world.

ELIZABETH. What sort *is* the right sort?

TEDDIE. A woman of courage and endurance and sincerity. Of course, it's hopeless unless she's in love with her husband. [*He is looking at her earnestly, and she, raising her eyes, gives him a long look. There is silence between them.*] My house stands on the side of a hill, and the coconut-trees wind down to the shore. Azaleas grow in my garden and camellias and all sorts of ripping flowers. And in front of me is the winding coastline, and then the blue sea. [*A pause.*] Do you know, that I'm awfully in love with you?

ELIZABETH [*gravely*]. I wasn't quite sure. I wondered.

TEDDIE. And you? [*She nods slowly.*] I've never kissed you.

ELIZABETH. I don't want you to.

[*They look at one another steadily. They are both grave.* ARNOLD *comes in hurriedly from garden.*

ARNOLD. They're coming, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH [*as though returning from a distant world*]. Who?

ARNOLD [*impatiently*]. My dear. My mother, of course. The car is just coming up the drive.

TEDDIE [*rises*]. Would you like me to clear out?

ARNOLD. No, no. For goodness' sake stay.

ELIZABETH. We'd better go and meet them, Arnold.

ARNOLD. No, no. I think they'd much better be shown in. I feel simply sick with nervousness.

[TEDDIE *goes round back of settee to down left.* ANNA *comes in from the garden, up right, and goes to back of settee.*

ANNA. Your guests have arrived.

ELIZABETH. Yes, I know.

ARNOLD. I've given orders that luncheon should be served at once

ELIZABETH. Why? It's not half-past one already, is it?

ARNOLD. I thought it would help. When you don't know exactly what to say you can always eat.

[*The* BUTLER *comes in door up right, and announces:*

BUTLER. Lady Catherine Champion-Cheney—Lord Porteous.

[LADY KITTY *comes in, followed by* PORTEOUS.

[*And the* BUTLER *goes out.*

[LADY KITTY *is a gay little lady, with dyed red hair and painted cheeks. She is somewhat outrageously dressed. She never forgets that she has been a pretty woman, and she still behaves as if she were twenty-five.* LORD PORTEOUS *is a very bald, elderly gentleman in loose, rather eccentric clothes.*

*He is snappy and gruff. This is not at all the couple that* ELIZABETH *expected, and for a moment she stares at them with round, startled eyes.* LADY KITTY *goes up to her with outstretched hands.*

LADY KITTY. Elizabeth. Elizabeth. [*She kisses her effusively.*] What an adorable creature. [*Turning to* PORTEOUS] Hughie, isn't she adorable?

PORTEOUS [*with a grunt*]. Ugh!

[ELIZABETH; *smiling now, turns to him and gives him her hand.*

ELIZABETH. How d'you do?

PORTEOUS. Damnable roads you've got down here. How d'you do, my dear? Why d'you have such damnable roads in England?

[LADY KITTY'S *eyes fall on* TEDDIE, *and she goes up to him with her arms thrown back, prepared to throw them round him.*

LADY KITTY. My boy, my boy, I should have known you anywhere.

ELIZABETH [*pointing right hastily*]. This is Arnold.

LADY KITTY [*without a moment's hesitation*]. The image of his father. I should have known him anywhere. [*She throws her arms out.*] My boy, my boy. [*He kisses her.*

PORTEOUS [*with a grunt*]. Ugh!

LADY KITTY. Tell me, would you have known me again? Have I changed?

ARNOLD. I was only five, you know, when—when you . . .

LADY KITTY [*emotionally*]. I remember as if it was yesterday. I went up into your room. [*With a sudden change of manner*] By the way, I always thought that nurse drank. Did you ever find out if she really did?

PORTEOUS. How the devil can you expect him to know that, Kitty?

LADY KITTY. You've never had a child, Hughie; how can you tell what they know and what they don't?

ELIZABETH [*coming to the rescue*]. This is Arnold, Lord Porteous.

[ARNOLD *crosses to* PORTEOUS.

PORTEOUS [*shaking hands with him*]. How d'you do? I know your father.

ARNOLD. Yes.

PORTEOUS. Alive still?

ARNOLD. Yes.

PORTEOUS. He must be getting on. Is he well?

ARNOLD. Very.

PORTEOUS. Ugh! Takes care of himself, I suppose. I'm not at all well. This damned climate doesn't agree with me.

ELIZABETH [*to* LADY KITTY]. This is Mrs Shenstone. And this is Mr Luton. [PORTEOUS *shakes hands with* TEDDIE.] I hope you don't mind a very small party.

LADY KITTY. Oh, no, I shall enjoy it. I used to give enormous parties here. Political, you know. How nice you've made this room!

ELIZABETH. Oh, that's Arnold.

ARNOLD [*nervously*]. D'you like this chair? I've just bought it. It's exactly my period.

PORTEOUS [*bluntly*]. It's a fake.

ARNOLD [*indignantly*]. I don't think it is, for a minute.

PORTEOUS. The legs are not right.

ARNOLD. I don't know how you can say that. If there is anything right about it, it's the legs.

LADY KITTY. I'm sure they're right.

PORTEOUS. You know nothing whatever about it, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. That's what you think. *I* think it's a beautiful chair.

PORTEOUS. What do you call it, Hepplewhite?

ARNOLD. No, Sheraton.

LADY KITTY. Oh, I know. *The School for Scandal.*

PORTEOUS. Sheraton, my dear. Sheraton.

LADY KITTY. Yes, that's what I say. I acted the screen scene at some amateur theatricals in Florence, and Ermete Novelli, the great Italian tragedian, told me he'd never seen a Lady Teazle like me.

[ELIZABETH *sits on stool.*

PORTEOUS. Ugh!

LADY KITTY [*to* ELIZABETH]. Do you act?

ELIZABETH. Oh, I couldn't. I should be too nervous.

LADY KITTY. I'm never nervous. [*Sits by* ELIZABETH.] I'm a born actress. Of course, if I had my time over again I'd go on the stage. You know, it's extraordinary how they keep young. Actresses, I mean. I think it's because they're always playing different parts. Hughie, do you think Arnold takes after me or after his father? Of course, I think he's the very image of me. [*Rises and goes to him.*] Arnold, I think I ought to tell you that I took up Church last winter. I'd been thinking about it for years, and last time we were at Monte Carlo I met such a nice chaplain. I told him what my difficulties were, and he was too wonderful. I knew Hughie wouldn't approve, so I kept it a secret. [*To* ELIZABETH] Are you interested in religion? I think it's too wonderful. We must have a long talk about it one of these days. [*Sits again, touching her frock.*] Callot?

ELIZABETH. No, Worth.

[PORTEOUS *begins to open and close his mouth.*

LADY KITTY. I knew it was either Worth or Callot. Of course, it's line that's the important thing. I go to Worth myself, and I always say to him: "Line, my dear Worth, line." What *is* the matter, Hughie?

PORTEOUS. These new teeth of mine are so damned uncomfortable.

LADY KITTY. Men are extraordinary. They can't stand the smallest discomfort. Why, a woman's life is uncomfortable from the moment she gets up in the morning till the moment she goes to bed at night. And d'you think it's comfortable to sleep with a mask on your face?

PORTEOUS. They don't seem to hold up properly.

LADY KITTY. Well, that's not the fault of your teeth. That's the fault of your gums.

PORTEOUS. Damned rotten dentist. That's what's the matter.

LADY KITTY. I thought he was a very nice dentist. He told me *my* teeth would last till I was fifty. He has a Chinese room. It's so interesting, while he scrapes your teeth he tells you all about the dear Empress Dowager. Are you interested in China? I think it's too wonderful. You know they've cut off their pigtails. I think it's such a pity. They were so picturesque.

[*The* BUTLER *comes in, double doors right, leaving them open on exit.*

BUTLER. Luncheon is served, sir. [*Exit.*

ELIZABETH. Would you like to see your rooms?

[PORTEOUS, ELIZABETH, *and* LADY KITTY *rise.*

PORTEOUS. We can see our rooms after luncheon.

LADY KITTY. I must powder my nose, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Powder it down here.

LADY KITTY. I never saw anyone so inconsiderate.

PORTEOUS. You'll keep us all waiting half an hour. I know you.

LADY KITTY [*fumbling in her bag*]. Oh, well, peace at any price, as Lord Beaconsfield said.

PORTEOUS. He said a lot of damned silly things, Kitty, but he never said that.

[LADY KITTY'S *face changes. Perplexity is followed by dismay, and dismay by consternation.*

LADY KITTY. Oh!

ELIZABETH. What is the matter?

LADY KITTY [*with anguish*]. My lipstick.

ELIZABETH. Can't you find it?

LADY KITTY. I had it in the car. Hughie, you remember that I had it in the car.

PORTEOUS. I don't remember anything about it.

LADY KITTY. Don't be so stupid, Hughie. Why, when we came through the gates, I said, "My home, my home," and I took it out and put some on my lips.

ELIZABETH. Perhaps you dropped it in the car.

LADY KITTY. For heaven's sake send some one to look for it.

ARNOLD. I'll ring. [*Crosses left, presses bell-push.*

LADY KITTY. I'm absolutely lost without my lipstick. Lend me yours, darling, will you?

ELIZABETH. I'm awfully sorry. I'm afraid I haven't got one.

LADY KITTY. Do you mean to say you don't use a lipstick?

ELIZABETH. Never.

PORTEOUS. Look at her lips. What the dickens d'you think she wants muck like that for?

LADY KITTY. Oh, my dear, what a mistake you make. You *must* use a lipstick. It's so good for the lips. Men like it, you know. I couldn't *live* without a lipstick.

[CHAMPION-CHENEY *appears at the window holding in his outstretched hand a little gold case.*

CLIVE [*as he comes in*]. Has anyone here lost a diminutive utensil containing, unless I am mistaken, a favourite preparation for the toilet?

[ARNOLD *and* ELIZABETH *are thunderstruck at his appearance, and even* TEDDIE *and* ANNA *are taken aback. But* LADY KITTY *is overjoyed.*

LADY KITTY. My lipstick.

CLIVE. I found it in the drive, and I ventured to bring it in.

LADY KITTY. It's Saint Anthony. I said a little prayer to him when I was hunting in my bag. [*Uses lipstick.*

PORTEOUS. Saint Anthony be blowed! It's Clive, by God!

LADY KITTY [*startled, her attention suddenly turning from the lipstick*]. Clive!

CLIVE. You didn't recognize me. It's many years since we met.

LADY KITTY. My poor Clive, your hair has gone quite white.

CLIVE [*holding out his hand*]. I hope you had a pleasant journey down from London.

LADY KITTY [*offering him her cheek*]. You may kiss me, Clive.

CLIVE [*kissing her*]. You don't mind, Hughie?

PORTEOUS [*with a grunt*]. Ugh!

CLIVE [*going up to him cordially, extending hand*]. And how are you, my dear Hughie?

PORTEOUS. Damned rheumatic, if you want to know. Filthy climate you have in this country.

CLIVE. Aren't you going to shake hands with me, Hughie?

PORTEOUS. I have no objection to shaking hands with you.

[*Shakes grudgingly.*

CLIVE. You've aged, my poor Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Some one was asking me the other day how old you were.

CLIVE. Were they surprised when you told them?

PORTEOUS. Surprised! They wondered you weren't dead.

[*The* FOOTMAN *comes in door up right.*

FOOTMAN. Did you ring, sir?

ARNOLD. No. Oh, yes, I did. It doesn't matter now.

CLIVE [*as the* FOOTMAN *is going*]. One moment. My dear Elizabeth,

I've come to throw myself on your mercy. My servants are busy with their own affairs. There's not a thing for me to eat in my cottage.

ELIZABETH. Oh, but we shall be delighted if you'll lunch with us.

CLIVE. It either means that, or my immediate death from starvation. You don't mind, Arnold?

ARNOLD. My dear father!

ELIZABETH [*to the* FOOTMAN]. Mr Cheney will lunch here.

FOOTMAN. Very good, ma'am. [*Exit door up right.*

CLIVE [*to* LADY KITTY]. And how do you think Arnold is looking?

LADY KITTY. I adore him.

CLIVE. He's grown, hasn't he? But, then, you'd expect him to do that in thirty years.

ARNOLD. For God's sake let's go in to lunch, Elizabeth.

[*Crosses quickly to doors right.*

[*All move towards dining-room:* CLIVE *with* LADY KITTY, PORTEOUS *with* ELIZABETH, *and* ANNA *with* TEDDIE.

## ACT II

SCENE: *The scene is the same as in the preceding Act; it is afternoon. When the curtain rises* PORTEOUS *and* LADY KITTY, ANNA *and* TEDDIE, *are playing bridge.* CLIVE *and* ELIZABETH *stand watching.* PORTEOUS *and* LADY KITTY *are partners.* ANNA *leads ace of spades from dummy's hand—a round is played before dialogue.*

CLIVE. When will Arnold be back, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. Soon, I think.

CLIVE. Is he addressing a meeting?

ELIZABETH. No, it's only a conference with his agent and one or two constituents.

PORTEOUS [*looking round at* ELIZABETH—*his left hand with cards falling. Irritably*]. How anyone can be expected to play bridge when people are shouting at the top of their voices, I for one cannot understand.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. I'm so sorry.

ANNA. I can see your hand, Lord Porteous.

PORTEOUS. It may help you.

[ANNA *plays king of spades from dummy.*

LADY KITTY. I've told you over and over again to hold your cards

up. It ruins one's game when one can't help seeing one's opponent's hand.

PORTEOUS. One isn't obliged to look.

LADY KITTY. What was Arnold's majority at the last election?

[ANNA *takes up trick.*

ELIZABETH. Seven hundred and something. [ANNA *plays from hand.*

CLIVE. He'll have to fight for it if he wants to keep his seat next time.

PORTEOUS [*playing card*]. Are we playing bridge or talking politics?

LADY KITTY. I never find that conversation interferes with my game.

PORTEOUS. You certainly play no worse when you talk than when you hold your tongue.

LADY KITTY. I think that's a very offensive thing to say, Hughie. Just because I don't play the same game as you do, you think I can't play.

PORTEOUS. I'm glad you acknowledge it's not the same game as I play. But why, in God's name, do you call it bridge?

[*Plays club on heart trick.*

CLIVE. I agree with Kitty. I hate people who play bridge as though they were at a funeral, and knew their feet were getting wet.

[ANNA *plays club from dummy.*

PORTEOUS. Of course, you take Kitty's part.

LADY KITTY. That's the least he can do.

CLIVE. I have a naturally cheerful disposition.

PORTEOUS. You've never had anything to sour it.

[ANNA *leads club from dummy.*

LADY KITTY. I don't know what you mean by that, Hughie.

[*A round is played in silence*—LADY KITTY *trumps* LORD PORTEOUS' *ace of clubs.*

PORTEOUS [*trying to contain himself*]. Must you trump my ace?

LADY KITTY [*innocently*]. Oh, was that your ace, darling?

PORTEOUS [*furiously*]. Yes, it was my ace.

LADY KITTY. Oh, well, it was the only trump I had. I shouldn't have made it, anyway.

PORTEOUS. You needn't have told them that. Now she knows exactly what I've got.

LADY KITTY. She knew before.

PORTEOUS. How could she know?

LADY KITTY. She said she'd seen your hand.

ANNA. Oh, I didn't. I said I could see it.

[LORD PORTEOUS *takes up trick*—LADY KITTY *leads heart.*

LADY KITTY. Well, I naturally supposed that if she could see it she did.

PORTEOUS. Really, Kitty, you have the most extraordinary ideas.

CLIVE. Not at all. If anyone is such a fool as to show me his hand, of course I look at it. [ANNA *takes up trick.*

PORTEOUS [*fuming*]. If you study the etiquette of bridge, you'll discover that onlookers are expected not to interfere with the game.

CLIVE. My dear Hughie, this is a matter of ethics, not of bridge.

ANNA [*throwing down her remaining two cards*]. Anyhow, I get the game.

TEDDIE. And rubber!

ANNA. And I claim a revoke.

PORTEOUS [*looks at* ANNA—*then at all the others—and back at* ANNA]. Who revoked?

TEDDIE. You did.

PORTEOUS. Nonsense. I've never revoked in my life.

TEDDIE. I'll show you. [*He turns over the tricks to show the faces of the cards*]. You discarded a club on the third round of hearts and you had another heart in your hand.

PORTEOUS. I never had more than two hearts.

TEDDIE. Oh, yes, you had. Look here. That's the heart you played on the last trick but one.

LADY KITTY [*delighted to catch him out*]. There's no doubt about it, Hughie, you revoked.

PORTEOUS. I tell you I did not revoke. I never revoke.

CLIVE. You did, Hughie. I wondered what on earth you were doing.

PORTEOUS. I don't know how anyone can be expected not to revoke when there's this confounded chatter going on all the time.

[*Takes up patience cards, pushing away other cards.*

TEDDIE. Well, that's another hundred and fifty to us.

PORTEOUS [*to* CLIVE, *who is picking up cards*]. I wish you wouldn't blow down my neck. I never can play bridge when there's somebody blowing down my neck. [*He begins to play patience.*

ANNA [*rises*]. Well, I'm going to take a book and lie down in the hammock till it's time to dress for dinner. [*Goes to table for book.*

TEDDIE [*who has been adding up—rising*]. I'll put it down in the book, shall I?

PORTEOUS [*who has not moved, setting out the cards for a patience*]. Yes, yes, put it down. I never revoke. [ANNA *goes out.*

LADY KITTY [*rises*]. Would you like to come for a little stroll, Hughie?

PORTEOUS. What for?

LADY KITTY. Exercise.

PORTEOUS. I hate exercise.

CLIVE [*looking at the patience*]. The seven goes on the eight.

[PORTEOUS *takes no notice.*

LADY KITTY [*behind table*]. The seven goes on the eight, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. I don't choose to put the seven on the eight.

CLIVE. That knave goes on the queen.

PORTEOUS. I'm not blind, thank you.

LADY KITTY. The three goes on the four.

CLIVE. All these go over.

PORTEOUS [*furiously*]. Am I playing this patience, or are you?

LADY KITTY. But you're missing everything.

PORTEOUS. That's my business.

CLIVE. It's no good losing your temper over it, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Go away, both of you. You irritate me.

LADY KITTY. We were only trying to help you, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. I don't want to be helped. I want to do it by myself.

LADY KITTY. I think your manners are perfectly deplorable, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. It's simply maddening when you're playing patience and people won't leave you alone.

CLIVE. We won't say another word.

[LADY KITTY *sits behind table.* CLIVE *smokes cigarette.*

PORTEOUS. That three goes. I believe it's coming out. If I'd been such a fool as to put that seven up I shouldn't have been able to bring these down. [*He puts down four cards while they watch him silently.*

LADY KITTY *and* CLIVE [*together*]. The four goes on the five.

PORTEOUS [*throwing the cards down violently*]. Damn it, why don't you leave me alone? It's intolerable.

CLIVE. It was coming out, my dear fellow.

PORTEOUS. I know it was coming out. Confound you!

LADY KITTY [*rises*]. How petty you are, Hughie!

PORTEOUS. Petty be damned! I've told you over and over again that I will not be interfered with when I'm playing patience.

LADY KITTY. Don't talk to me like that, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. I shall talk to you as I please.

LADY KITTY [*beginning to cry*]. Oh, you brute! You brute!

[*She flings out of the room up right.* TEDDIE *opens door.*

PORTEOUS. Oh, damn! Now she's going to cry.

[*He stumps out into the garden up left.*

[CLIVE, ELIZABETH, *and* TEDDIE *left alone. There is a moment's pause.* CLIVE *looks from* TEDDIE *to* ELIZABETH *with an ironical smile.* TEDDIE *comes to table, collects cards—sits right of it.*

CLIVE. Upon my soul, they might be married. They frip so much.

ELIZABETH [*frigidly*]. It's been nice of you to come here so often since they arrived. It's helped to make things easy.

CLIVE. Irony? It's a rhetorical form not much favoured in this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

ELIZABETH. What exactly are you getting at?

CLIVE. How slangy the young women of the present day are. I suppose the fact that Arnold is a purist leads you to the contrary extravagance.

ELIZABETH. Anyhow, you know what I mean.

CLIVE [*with a smile*]. I have a dim, groping suspicion.

ELIZABETH. You promised to keep away. Why did you come back the moment they arrived?

CLIVE. Curiosity, my dear child. A surely pardonable curiosity.

ELIZABETH. And since then you've been here all the time. You don't generally favour us with so much of your company when you're down at your cottage.

CLIVE. I've been excessively amused. [*Sits left of table.*

ELIZABETH. It has struck me that whenever they started fripping you took a malicious pleasure in goading them on.

CLIVE. I don't think there's much love lost between them now, do you? [TEDDIE *is making as though to leave the room.*

ELIZABETH. Don't go, Teddie.

CLIVE. No, please don't. I'm only staying a minute. We were talking about Lady Kitty just before she arrived. [*To* ELIZABETH] Do you remember? The pale, frail lady in black satin and old lace.

ELIZABETH [*with a chuckle*]. You are a devil, you know.

[TEDDIE *plays patience.*

CLIVE. Ah, well, he's always had the reputation of being a humorist and a gentleman.

ELIZABETH. Did *you* expect her to be like that, poor dear?

CLIVE. My dear child, I hadn't the vaguest idea. You were asking me the other day what she was like when she ran away. I didn't tell you half. She was so gay and so natural. Who would have thought that animation would turn into such frivolity, and that charming impulsiveness lead to such a ridiculous affectation?

ELIZABETH. It rather sets my nerves on edge to hear the way you talk of her.

CLIVE. It's the truth that sets your nerves on edge, not I.

ELIZABETH. You loved her once. Have you no feeling for her at all?

CLIVE. None. Why should I?

ELIZABETH. She's the mother of your son.

CLIVE. My dear child, you have a charming nature, as simple, frank, and artless as hers was. Don't let pure humbug obscure your common sense.

ELIZABETH. We have no right to judge. She's only been here two days. We know nothing about her.

CLIVE. My dear, her soul is as thickly rouged as her face. She hasn't an emotion that's sincere. She's tinsel. You think I'm a cruel,

cynical old man. Why, when I think of what she was, if I didn't laugh at what she has become I should cry.

ELIZABETH. How do you know she wouldn't be just the same now if she'd remained your wife? Do you think your influence would have had such a salutary effect on her?

CLIVE [*good-humouredly*]. I like you when you're bitter and rather insolent.

ELIZABETH. D'you like me enough to answer my question?

CLIVE. She was only twenty-seven when she went away. She might have become anything. She might have become the woman you expected her to be. There are very few of us who are strong enough to make circumstances serve us. We are the creatures of our environment. She's a silly worthless woman because she's led a silly worthless life.

ELIZABETH [*disturbed*]. You're horrible to-day. [TEDDIE *rises.*

CLIVE [*to* TEDDIE]. I'm just going. I don't say it's I who would have prevented her from becoming this ridiculous caricature of a pretty woman grown old. But life could. [*Rises, goes to her.*] Here she would have had the friends fit to her station, and a decent activity, and worthy interests. Ask her what her life has been all these years among divorced women and kept women and the men who associate with them. There is no more lamentable pursuit than a life of pleasure.

ELIZABETH. At all events, she loved and she loved greatly. I have only pity and affection for her.

CLIVE. And if she loved, what d'you think she felt when she saw that she had ruined Hughie? Look at him. He was tight last night after dinner, and tight the night before.

ELIZABETH. I know.

CLIVE. And she took it as a matter of course. How long do you suppose he's been getting tight every night? Do you think he was like that thirty years ago? Can you imagine that that was a brilliant young man whom every one expected to be Prime Minister? Look at him now. A grumpy, sodden old fellow with false teeth

ELIZABETH. You have false teeth, too.

CLIVE. Yes, but, damn it all! they fit. She's ruined him, and she knows she's ruined him.

ELIZABETH [*looking at him suspiciously*]. Why are you saying all this to me?

CLIVE. Am I hurting your feelings?

ELIZABETH. I think I've had enough for the present.

CLIVE. Ah, well, I'll go and have a look at the goldfish. [*Goes up right.*] I want to see Arnold when he comes in. [*Politely*] I'm afraid we've been boring Mr Luton.

TEDDIE. Not at all.

CLIVE. When do you go back to the F.M.S.?

TEDDIE. In about a month.

CLIVE [*looks at her and back at him*]. I see.

[*He goes out to garden up right and crosses to left.*

[*They both watch him disappear. They look at each other—pause*—ELIZABETH *then rises and goes to fireplace.* TEDDIE *rises; takes cards and markers and puts them in box on cabinet up right, and comes centre.*

TEDDIE. It seems very difficult to get a few minutes alone with you. I wonder if you've been making it difficult.

ELIZABETH. I wanted to think.

TEDDIE. I've made up my mind to go away to-morrow.

ELIZABETH. Why?

TEDDIE. I want you altogether, or not at all.

ELIZABETH. You're so arbitrary.

TEDDIE. You said you—you said you cared for me.

ELIZABETH. I do.

TEDDIE. Do you mind if we talk it over?

ELIZABETH. No. [*Sits on settee.*

TEDDIE [*frowning*]. It makes me feel rather shy and awkward. I've repeated to myself over and over again exactly what I want to say to you, and now all I'd prepared seems rather footling.

ELIZABETH. I'm so afraid I'm going to cry.

TEDDIE. I feel it's all so tremendously serious, and I think we ought to keep emotion out of it. You're rather emotional, aren't you?

ELIZABETH [*half smiling and half in tears*]. So are you, for the matter of that.

TEDDIE. That's why I wanted to have everything I meant to say to you cut and dried. I think it would be awfully unfair if I made love to you and all that sort of thing, and you were carried away. I wrote it all down and thought I'd send it you as a letter.

ELIZABETH. Why didn't you?

TEDDIE. I got the wind up. A letter seems so—so cold! You see, I love you so awfully.

ELIZABETH. For goodness' sake don't say that.

TEDDIE. You mustn't cry. Please don't, or I shall go all to pieces.

ELIZABETH [*trying to smile*]. I'm sorry. It isn't anything really. It's only tears running out of my eyes.

TEDDIE [*he hits back of settee thrice*]. Our only chance is to be awfully matter-of-fact.

[*He stops for a moment. He finds it quite difficult to control himself. He clears his throat; he frowns with annoyance at himself.*

ELIZABETH. What's the matter?

TEDDIE. I don't know. I've got a lump in my throat. It's idiotic. I think I'll have a cigarette. [*She watches him in silence while he goes up to table centre and lights a cigarette.*] You see, I've never been in love with anyone before, not really. It's knocked me endways. I don't know how I can live without you now. . . . Does that old fool know I'm in love with you?

ELIZABETH. I think so.

TEDDIE. When he was talking about Lady Kitty smashing up Lord Porteous' career, I thought there was something at the back of it.

ELIZABETH. I think he was trying to persuade me not to smash up yours.

TEDDIE [*puts cigarette on ash-tray*]. I'm sure that's very considerate of him, but I don't happen to have one to smash. I wish I had. It's the only time in my life I've wished I were a hell of a swell, so that I could chuck it all and show you how much more you are to me than anything else in the world.

ELIZABETH [*affectionately*]. You are a dear old thing, Teddie.

TEDDIE. You know, I don't really know how to make love, but if I did I couldn't do it now because I just want to be absolutely practical.

ELIZABETH [*chaffing*]. I'm glad you don't know how to make love. It would be almost more than I could bear.

TEDDIE. You see, I'm not at all romantic and that sort of thing. I'm just a common or garden business man. All this is so dreadfully serious and I think we ought to be sensible.

ELIZABETH [*with a break in her voice*]. You owl!

TEDDIE. No, Elizabeth, don't say things like that to me. I want you to consider all the pros and cons, and my heart's thumping against my chest, and you know I love you, I love you, I love you.

ELIZABETH [*in a sigh of passion*]. Oh, my precious!

TEDDIE [*impatiently, but with himself, rather than with* ELIZABETH]. Don't be idiotic, Elizabeth. I'm not going to tell you that I can't live without you and a lot of rot like that. You know that you mean everything in the world to me. [*Almost giving it up as a bad job*] Oh, my God!

ELIZABETH [*her voice faltering*]. D'you think there's anything you can say to me that I don't know already?

TEDDIE [*desperately*]. But I haven't said a single thing I wanted to. I'm a business man, and I want to put it all in a business way, if you understand what I mean.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. I don't believe you're a very good business man.

TEDDIE [*sharply*]. You don't know what you're talking about. I'm a first-rate business man; but, somehow, this is different. [*Hopelessly*] I don't know why it won't go right.

ELIZABETH. What are we going to do about it?

TEDDIE [*sits by her*]. You see, it's not just because you're awfully pretty that I love you. I'd love you just as much if you were old and ugly. It's you I love, not what you look like. And it's not only love; love be blowed! It's that I *like* you so tremendously. I think you're such a ripping good sort. I just want to be with you; I feel so jolly and happy, just to think you're there. I'm so awfully *fond* of you.

ELIZABETH [*laughing through her tears*]. I don't know if this is your idea of introducing a business proposition.

TEDDIE. Damn you! you won't let me.

ELIZABETH. You said "Damn you!"

TEDDIE. I meant it.

ELIZABETH. You sounded as if you meant it, you perfect darling.

TEDDIE [*rises*]. Really, Elizabeth, you're intolerable.

ELIZABETH. I'm doing nothing.

TEDDIE. Yes, you are; you're putting me off my blow. What I want to say is perfectly simple. I'm a very ordinary business man——

ELIZABETH. You've said that before.

TEDDIE [*angrily*]. Shut up! I haven't got a bob beside what I earn. I've got no position. I'm nothing. You're rich and you're a big pot and you've got everything that anyone can want. It's awful cheek my saying anything to you at all. But, after all, there's only one thing that really matters in the world, and that's love. I love you. Chuck all this, Elizabeth, and come to me.

ELIZABETH. Are you cross with me?

TEDDIE. Furious.

ELIZABETH. Darling!

TEDDIE. If you don't want me, tell me so at once and let me get out quickly.

ELIZABETH [*rises*]. Teddie, nothing in the world matters anything to me but you. I'll go wherever you take me. I love you.

TEDDIE [*all to pieces*]. Oh, my God!

ELIZABETH. Does it mean as much to you as that? Oh, Teddie.

[*Cries.*

TEDDIE [*trying to control himself*]. Don't be a fool, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. It's you're the fool. You're making me cry.

TEDDIE. You're so damned emotional.

ELIZABETH. Damned emotional yourself. I'm sure you're a rotten business man.

TEDDIE. I don't care what you think. You've made me so awfully happy. I say, what a lark life's going to be. [*Goes up centre.*

ELIZABETH. Teddie, you are an angel.

TEDDIE. Let's get out quick. It's no good wasting time. [*Pause.*] Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. What?

TEDDIE. Nothing. I just like to say Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. You fool.

TEDDIE. I say, can you shoot? [*Comes down to her.*

ELIZABETH. No.

TEDDIE. I'll teach you. You don't know how ripping it is to start ut from your camp at dawn and travel through the jungle. And ou're so tired at night and the sky's all starry. Of course, I didn't ant to say anything about all that till you'd decided. I'd made up ıy mind to be absolutely practical.

ELIZABETH [*chaffing him*]. The only practical thing you said was that ove is the only thing that really matters.

TEDDIE [*happily*]. Pull the other leg next time, will you? I should ate to have one longer than the other.

ELIZABETH. Isn't it fun being in love with some one who's in love ith you?

TEDDIE. I say, I think I'd better clear out at once, don't you? It eems rather rotten to stay on in—in this house.

ELIZABETH. You can't go to-night. There's no train.

TEDDIE. I'll go to-morrow. I'll wait in London till you're ready to oin me.

ELIZABETH. I'm not going to leave a note on the pin-cushion like ady Kitty, you know. I'm going to tell Arnold.

TEDDIE. Are you? Don't you think there'll be an awful bother?

ELIZABETH. I must face it. I should hate to be sly and deceitful.

TEDDIE. Well, then, let's face it together.

ELIZABETH. No; I'll talk to Arnold by myself.

TEDDIE. You won't let anyone influence you?

ELIZABETH. No.

[*He holds out his hand and she takes it. They look into one another's eyes with grave, almost solemn affection.*

*Goes to double doors right.*] There's the car. Arnold's come back. must go and bathe my eyes. I don't want them to see I've been rying.

TEDDIE. All right. [*As she is at doors*] Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH [*stopping*]. What?

TEDDIE. Bless you.

ELIZABETH [*affectionately*]. Idiot.

[*She goes out of the double doors, and* TEDDIE *through the French window into the garden.*

[*For an instant the room is empty.* ARNOLD *comes in door up right. He puts dispatch-case on table up centre, moves chair at back of card-table up to table centre, goes left, and rings—moves chair at left of card-table to back of same. He then takes paper from dispatch-case, and is moving down*

*left as* FOOTMAN *enters, tablecloth over his arm, carrying tray with muffin and cake dish.*

ARNOLD [*on settee*]. I rang for tea—oh——

[FOOTMAN *deposits tray on table right, and is spreading cloth on card-table as* BUTLER *enters, carrying tray with tea things* (*except teapot*). *He puts them down and goes round below table—lays muffin-dish and cake-dish on tea-table and takes plates off tray.* FOOTMAN *moves chair up centre down to left of card-table and long seat up right as* LADY KITTY *enters.*

LADY KITTY. I saw you come in. [FOOTMAN *and* BUTLER (*with tray*) *exeunt up right.*] Oh, my dear, don't get up. There's no reason why you should be so dreadfully polite to me.

ARNOLD. I've just rung for a cup of tea.

LADY KITTY [*sits left of card-table*]. Perhaps we shall have the chance of a little talk. We don't seem to have had five minutes by ourselves. I want to make your acquaintance, you know.

ARNOLD. I should like you to know that it's not by my wish that my father is here.

LADY KITTY. But I'm so interested to see him.

ARNOLD. I was afraid that you and Lord Porteous must find it embarrassing.

LADY KITTY. Oh, no. Hughie was his greatest friend. [*The* BUTLER *brings in a tray on which is teapot.*] They were at Eton and Oxford together. I think your father has improved so much since I saw him last. He wasn't good-looking as a young man, but now he is quite handsome. Shall I pour it out for you?

ARNOLD [*goes round table to right, sits*]. Thank you very much.

LADY KITTY. Do you take sugar?

ARNOLD. No. I gave it up during the War.

LADY KITTY [*pours out milk*]. So wise of you. It's so bad for the figure. Besides being patriotic, of course. Isn't it absurd that one should ask my son if he takes sugar or not? [*Gives him tea.*] Life is really very quaint. Sad, of course, but, oh! so quaint. [*Pouring out her own tea*] Often I lie in bed at night and have a good laugh to myself as I think how quaint life is. [*Laughs*

ARNOLD. I'm afraid I'm a very serious person.

[*Hands her muffin-dish*

LADY KITTY. How old are you now, Arnold?

ARNOLD. Thirty-five.

LADY KITTY. Are you really? Of course I was a child when I married your father.

ARNOLD. Really? He always told me you were twenty-two.

LADY KITTY. Oh, what nonsense! Why, I was married out of the

arsery. [*He squirms.*] I put my hair up for the first time on my edding-day.

ARNOLD. Where is Lord Porteous?

LADY KITTY. My dear, it sounds too absurd to hear you call him ord Porteous. Why don't you call him—Uncle Hughie?

[*She sips tea.*

ARNOLD. He doesn't happen to *be* my uncle.

LADY KITTY. No, but he's your godfather. You know, I'm sure ou'll like him when you know him better. I'm so hoping that you nd Elizabeth will come and stay with us in Florence. I simply adore lizabeth. She's *too* beautiful.

ARNOLD. Her hair is very pretty.

LADY KITTY. It's not touched up, is it?

ARNOLD. Oh, no.

LADY KITTY. I just wondered. It's rather a coincidence that her air should be the same colour as mine. I suppose it shows that your ather and you are attracted by just the same thing. Heredity. So nteresting, isn't it?

ARNOLD. Very.

LADY KITTY [*puts down cup*]. Of course, since I took up church vork I don't believe in it any more. Darwin and all that sort of hing. Too dreadful. Wicked, you know. Besides, it's not very ood form, is it? [CLIVE *comes in at windows up left from the garden.*

CLIVE. Do I intrude?

LADY KITTY. Come in, Clive. Arnold and I have been having such wonderful heart-to-heart talk. [*Pours out tea for* CLIVE.

CLIVE. Very nice.

ARNOLD. Father, I stepped in for a moment at the Harveys' on my vay back. It's simply criminal what they're doing with that house.

CLIVE. What *are* they doing?

ARNOLD. It's an almost perfect Georgian house and they've got a ot of dreadful Victorian furniture. I gave them my ideas on the ubject, but it's quite hopeless. They said they were attached to their urniture. [LADY KITTY *gives* CLIVE *tea.*

CLIVE. Arnold should have been an interior decorator.

LADY KITTY. He has wonderful taste. He gets that from me.

ARNOLD. I suppose I have a certain *flair*. I have a passion for lecorating houses.

LADY KITTY. You've made this one charming.

CLIVE. D'you remember, we just had chintzes and comfortable chairs vhen we lived here, Kitty?

LADY KITTY. Perfectly hideous, wasn't it?

CLIVE. In those days gentlemen and ladies were not expected to ave taste.

ARNOLD [*rises, and goes across centre with teacup and saucer in hand*] You know, I've been looking at this chair again. Since Lord Porteou said the legs weren't right, I've been very uneasy.

[CLIVE *goes behind table down righ*

LADY KITTY. He only said that because he was in a bad temper.

CLIVE. His temper seems to me very short these days, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. Oh, it is, it is.

ARNOLD [*crosses back to table, sits*]. You feel he knows what he talking about. I gave sixty-five pounds for that chair. I'm very se dom taken in. I always think if a thing's right, you feel it.

CLIVE. Well, don't let it disturb your night's rest.

ARNOLD. But, my dear father, that's just what it does. I had most horrible dream about it last night.

[*Enter* LORD PORTEOUS *from up left. He is smoking ciga*

LADY KITTY. Here is Hughie.

ARNOLD. I must get that book I have on old English furnitur There's an illustration of a chair which is almost identical with th one.

[*Takes cigarette from cas*

[PORTEOUS *comes i*

PORTEOUS. Quite a family gathering, by George!

CLIVE. I was thinking just now we'd make a very pleasing pictu of a typical English home.

ARNOLD [*rises—disgusted*]. I'll be back in five minutes. There something I want to show you, Lord Porteous. [*Exit door up righ*

LADY KITTY. Tea, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Tea! Ugh!

[*He goes to table up centre and pours out whisky-and-sod*

CLIVE. Would you like to play piquet with me, Hughie?

PORTEOUS. Not particularly.

CLIVE. You were never much of a piquet-player, were you?

PORTEOUS. My dear Clive, you people don't know what piquet is i England.

CLIVE. Let's have a game, then. You may make money.

PORTEOUS. I don't want to play with you.

LADY KITTY. I don't know why not, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Let me tell you that I don't like your manner.

CLIVE. I'm sorry for that. I'm afraid I can't offer to change it a my age.

PORTEOUS. I don't know what you want to be hanging around here fo

CLIVE. A natural attachment to my home.

PORTEOUS. If you'd had any tact, you'd have kept out of the wa while we were here.

CLIVE. My dear Hughie, I don't understand your attitude, at al If I'm willing to let bygones be bygones, why should you object?

[PORTEOUS *drinks—splutters and puts glass on mantelpiece.*

PORTEOUS [*coming centre*]. Damn it all, they're not bygones!

CLIVE. After all, I am the injured party.

PORTEOUS. How the devil are you the injured party?

CLIVE. Well, you did run away with my wife, didn't you?

LADY KITTY. Now, don't let's go into ancient history. I can't see why we shouldn't all be friends.

PORTEOUS. I beg you not to interfere, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. I'm very fond of Clive.

PORTEOUS. You never cared two straws for Clive. You only say that to irritate me.

LADY KITTY. Not at all. I don't see why he shouldn't come and stay with us.

[CLIVE *laughs*—PORTEOUS *turns away, puffing cigar furiously.*

CLIVE. I'd love to. I think Florence in spring-time is delightful. We should be quite a family gathering, by George! [*Drinks.*

PORTEOUS [*turns on him*]. I never liked you; I don't like you now, and I never shall like you.

[*Goes to chair left, takes up "Sketch," which is on it.*

CLIVE. How very unfortunate, because I liked you, I like you now, and I shall continue to like you.

LADY KITTY. There's something very nice about you, Clive.

PORTEOUS. If you think that, why the devil did you leave him?

LADY KITTY [*rises*]. Are you going to reproach me because I loved you? How utterly, utterly, utterly detestable you are!

[PORTEOUS *sits in settee.*

CLIVE. Now, now, don't quarrel with one another.

LADY KITTY. It's all his fault. I'm the easiest person in the world to live with. But, really, he'd try the patience of a saint.

CLIVE. Come, come, don't get upset, Kitty. When two people live together there must be a certain amount of give and take.

PORTEOUS. I don't know what the devil you're talking about.

CLIVE. It hasn't escaped my observation that you are a little inclined to frip. Many couples are. I think it's a pity.

PORTEOUS. Would you have the very great kindness to mind your own business?

LADY KITTY. It is his business. He naturally wants me to be happy.

CLIVE. I have the very greatest affection for Kitty.

PORTEOUS. Then why the devil didn't you look after her properly?

CLIVE. My dear Hughie, you were my greatest friend. I trusted you. It may have been rash. [*Drinks.*

PORTEOUS. It was inexcusable.

LADY KITTY. I don't know what you mean by that, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Don't, don't, don't try and bully me, Kitty.

LADY KITTY. Oh, I know what you mean.

PORTEOUS. Then why the devil did you say you didn't?

LADY KITTY. When I think that I sacrificed everything for tha man. And for thirty years I've had to live in a filthy marble palac with no sanitary conveniences.

CLIVE. D'you mean to say you haven't got a bathroom?

LADY KITTY. I've had to wash in a tub.

CLIVE. My poor Kitty, how you've suffered! [*Lighting cigarett*

PORTEOUS [*rises*]. Really, Kitty, I'm sick of hearing of the sacrific you made. [*Throws down paper.*] I suppose you think I sacrifice nothing. I should have been Prime Minister by now if it hadn't bee for you.

LADY KITTY. Nonsense!

PORTEOUS. What do you mean by that? *Every one* said I shoul be Prime Minister. Shouldn't I have been Prime Minister, Clive?

CLIVE. It was certainly the general expectation.

PORTEOUS. I was the most promising young man of my day. I wa bound to get a seat in the Cabinet at the next election.

LADY KITTY. They'd have found you out, just as I've found yo out. [*Rises.*] I'm sick of hearing that I ruined your career. Yo never had a career to ruin. Prime Minister! You haven't the brain You haven't the character.

CLIVE. Cheek, push, and a gift of the gab will serve very well instead you know. [LORD PORTEOUS *turns to her*

LADY KITTY. Besides, in politics it's not the men that matter. It' the women at the back of them. I could have made Clive a Cabine Minister if I'd wanted to.

PORTEOUS. Clive? [*Throws cigar in fireplac*

LADY KITTY. With my beauty, my charm, my force of character my wit, I could have done anything.

PORTEOUS. Clive was nothing but my political secretary. When was Prime Minister I might have made him Governor of some colon or other.

LADY KITTY. Colony!

PORTEOUS. Western Australia, say. Out of pure kindliness.

LADY KITTY [*with flashing eyes, turns on him*]. D'you think I woul have buried myself in Western Australia? With my beauty, m charm?

PORTEOUS. Or Barbados, perhaps.

LADY KITTY [*furiously*]. Barbados! Barbados can go to—Barbados

PORTEOUS. That's all you'd have got.

LADY KITTY. Nonsense! I'd have India.

PORTEOUS. I would never have given you India.

LADY KITTY. You would have given me India.

PORTEOUS. I tell you I would not.

LADY KITTY. The King would have given me India. The nation would have insisted on my having India. I would have been a vice-reine or nothing.

PORTEOUS. I tell you that as long as the interests of the British Empire—— Damn it! all my teeth are coming out.

[*He hurries from the room by window right.*

LADY KITTY [*sits in settee*]. It's too much. I can't bear it any more. I've put up with him for thirty years, and now I'm at the end of my tether.

CLIVE [*goes to her*]. Calm yourself, my dear Kitty.

LADY KITTY. I won't listen to a word. I've quite made up my mind. It's finished, finished, finished. [*With a change of tone*] I was so touched when I heard that you never lived in this house again after I left it.

CLIVE. The cuckoos have always been very plentiful. [*She looks at him.*] Their note has a personal application which I must say I have found extremely offensive.

LADY KITTY. When I saw that you didn't marry again I couldn't help thinking that you still loved me.

CLIVE. I am one of the few men I know who is able to profit by experience.

LADY KITTY. In the eyes of the Church I am still your wife. The Church is so wise. It knows that in the end a woman always comes back to her first love. Clive, I am willing to return to you.

CLIVE. My dear Kitty, I couldn't take advantage of your momentary vexation with Hughie to let you take a step which I know you would bitterly regret. [ARNOLD *comes in with a large book in his hand.*

ARNOLD. I say, I've found the book I was hunting for. Oh, isn't Lord Porteous here?

LADY KITTY. One moment, Arnold. Your father and I are busy.

[CLIVE *goes to chair—sits.*

ARNOLD. I'm so sorry. [*He goes out into the garden right.*

LADY KITTY [*comes down to card-table by* CLIVE]. You've waited for me a long time. For Arnold's sake.

CLIVE. Do you think we really need bother about Arnold. In the last thirty years he's had time to grow used to the situation.

LADY KITTY [*with a little smile*]. I think I've sown my wild oats, Clive.

CLIVE. When you ran away from me, Kitty, I was sore and angry and miserable. But, above all, I felt a fool

LADY KITTY. Men are so vain.

CLIVE. But I was a student of history, and presently I reflected that I shared my misfortune with very nearly all the greatest men.

LADY KITTY. I'm a great reader, myself. It has always struck r as peculiar.

CLIVE. The explanation is very simple. Women dislike intelligenc and when they find it in their husbands they revenge themselves c them in the only way they can, by making them—well, what you ma me.

LADY KITTY. It's ingenious. It may be true.

CLIVE. I felt I had done my duty by society, and I determined devote the rest of my life to my own entertainment. The House Commons had always bored me excessively, and the scandal of o divorce gave me an opportunity to resign my seat. I have been relieve to find that the country got on perfectly well without me.

LADY KITTY. But has love never entered your life?

CLIVE. Tell me frankly, Kitty, don't you think people make a l of unnecessary fuss about love?

LADY KITTY. It's the most wonderful thing in the world.

CLIVE. You're incorrigible. Do you really think it was worth sacr ficing so much for?

LADY KITTY. My dear Clive, I don't mind telling you that if I h my time over again I should be unfaithful to you, but I should n leave you.

CLIVE [*rises*]. Then I think things are best as they are.

LADY KITTY [*going towards double doors right*]. There's only o course open to me now.

CLIVE. What is that?

LADY KITTY [*with a flashing smile*]. To go and dress for dinner.

CLIVE. Capital. I will follow your example.

[*As* LADY KITTY *goes out double doors* ELIZABETH *comes in do up right.*

ELIZABETH. Where is Arnold?

CLIVE. He's on the terrace. I'll call him.

ELIZABETH. Don't bother.

CLIVE. I was just strolling along to my cottage to put on a dinne jacket. [*As he goes out*] Arnold! [*Exit* CLIVE *into garden le*

ARNOLD. Hulloa! [*He comes in from garden right with book.*] O Elizabeth, I've found an illustration here of a chair which is almo identical with mine. It's dated 1780. Look.

ELIZABETH. That's very interesting.

ARNOLD. I want to show it to Porteous. [*Moving a chair whi has been misplaced.*] You know, it does exasperate me the way peo will not leave things alone. I no sooner put a thing in its place th somebody moves it. [*Takes chair by card-table up to table cent*

ELIZABETH. It must be maddening for you.

ARNOLD [*goes left*]. It is. You are the worst offender. I can't thi

why you don't take the pride that I do in the house. After all, it's one of the show-places in the country.

ELIZABETH. I'm afraid you find me very unsatisfactory.

ARNOLD [*good-humouredly*]. I don't know about that. But my two subjects are politics and decoration. I should be a perfect fool if I didn't see that you don't care two straws about either.

ELIZABETH. We haven't very much in common, Arnold, have we?

ARNOLD. I don't think you can blame me for that.

ELIZABETH. I don't. I blame you for nothing. I have no fault to find with you.

ARNOLD [*surprised at her significant tone*]. Good gracious me! what's the meaning of all this?

ELIZABETH. Well, I don't think there's any object in beating about the bush. I want you to let me go.

ARNOLD. Go where?

ELIZABETH. Away. For always.

ARNOLD. My dear child, what *are* you talking about?

ELIZABETH. I want to be free.

ARNOLD [*amused, rather than disconcerted. Sits in settee*]. Don't be ridiculous, darling. I dare say you're run down and want a change. I'll take you over to Paris for a fortnight, if you like.

ELIZABETH. I shouldn't have spoken to you if I hadn't quite made up my mind. We've been married for three years and I don't think it's been a great success. I'm frankly bored by the life you want me to lead.

ARNOLD. Well, if you'll allow me to say so, the fault is yours. We lead a very distinguished, useful life. We know a lot of extremely nice people.

ELIZABETH. I'm quite willing to allow that the fault is mine. But how does that make it any better? I'm only twenty-five. If I've made a mistake, I have time to correct it.

ARNOLD. I can't bring myself to take you very seriously.

ELIZABETH. You see, I don't love you.

ARNOLD. Well, I'm awfully sorry. But you weren't obliged to marry me. You've made your bed, and I'm afraid you must lie on it.

ELIZABETH. That's one of the falsest proverbs in the English language. Why should you lie on the bed you've made if you don't want to? There's always the floor.

ARNOLD [*rises, puts down book*]. For goodness' sake don't be funny, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I've quite made up my mind to leave you, Arnold.

ARNOLD. Come, come, Elizabeth, you must be sensible. You haven't any reason to leave me.

ELIZABETH. Why should you wish to keep a woman tied to you who wants to be free?

ARNOLD. I happen to be in love with you.

ELIZABETH. You might have said that before.

ARNOLD. I thought you'd take it for granted. You can't expect a man to go on making love to his wife after three years. I'm very busy. I'm awfully keen on politics, and I've worked like a dog to make this house a thing of beauty. After all, a man marries to have a home, but also because he doesn't want to be bothered with sex and all that sort of thing. I fell in love with you the first time I saw you, and I've been in love ever since.

ELIZABETH. I'm sorry, but if you're not in love with a man his love doesn't mean very much to you.

ARNOLD. It's so ungrateful. I've done everything in the world for you.

ELIZABETH. You've been very kind to me. But you've asked me to lead a life I don't like, and that I'm not suited for. I'm awfully sorry to cause you pain, but now you must let me go.

ARNOLD [*goes to her*]. Nonsense! I'm a good deal older than you are, and I think I have a little more sense. In your interests as well as in mine, I shall do nothing of the sort.

ELIZABETH [*with a smile*]. How can you prevent me? You can't keep me under lock and key.

ARNOLD. Oh, for goodness' sake don't talk to me as if I were a foolish child. You're my wife, and you're going to remain my wife.

ELIZABETH. What sort of a life do you think we should lead? Do you think there'd be any more happiness for you than for me?

ARNOLD. But what is it precisely that you suggest?

ELIZABETH. I want you to let me divorce you.

ARNOLD [*astounded*]. Me? Thank you very much. Are you under the impression I'm going to sacrifice my career for a whim of yours?

ELIZABETH. How will it do that?

ARNOLD. My seat's wobbly enough, as it is. Do you think I'd be able to hold it if I were in a divorce case? Even if it were a put-up job, as most divorce cases are nowadays, it would damn me.

ELIZABETH. It's rather hard on a woman to be divorced.

ARNOLD [*with sudden suspicion*]. What do you mean by that? Are you in love with some one?

ELIZABETH. Yes.

ARNOLD. Who?

ELIZABETH. Teddie Luton. [*He is astonished for a moment.*

ARNOLD [*sits in settee*]. My poor child, how can you be so ridiculous? Why, he hasn't a bob. He's a perfectly commonplace young man. It's so absurd, I can't even be angry with you.

ELIZABETH. I've fallen desperately in love with him, Arnold.

ARNOLD. Well, you'd better fall desperately out.

ELIZABETH. He wants to marry me.

ARNOLD. I dare say he does. He can go to hell!

ELIZABETH. It's no good talking like that.

ARNOLD [*rises*]. Is he your lover?

ELIZABETH. No, certainly not.

ARNOLD. It shows that he's a mean skunk to take advantage of my hospitality to make love to you.

ELIZABETH. He's never even kissed me.

ARNOLD. I should try telling that to the horse marines if I were you.

ELIZABETH. It's because I wanted to do nothing shabby that I told you straight out how things were.

ARNOLD. How long have you been thinking of this?

ELIZABETH. I've been in love with Teddie ever since I knew him.

ARNOLD. And you never thought of me at all, I suppose?

ELIZABETH. Oh, yes, I did. I was miserable, but I can't help myself. I wish I loved you, but I don't.

ARNOLD. I recommend you to think very carefully before you do anything foolish.

ELIZABETH. I have thought very carefully.

ARNOLD. By God! I don't know why I don't give you a sound hiding. I'm not sure if that wouldn't be the best thing to bring you to your senses.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold, don't take it like that.

ARNOLD. How do you expect me to take it? You come to me quite calmly and say: "I've had enough of you. We've been married three years and I think I'd like to marry somebody else now. Shall I break up your home? What a bore for you. Do you mind my divorcing you? It'll smash up your career, will it? What a pity!" Oh, no, my girl; I may be a fool, but I'm not a damned fool.

ELIZABETH. Teddie is leaving here by the first train to-morrow. I warn you that I mean to join him as soon as he can make the necessary arrangements.

ARNOLD. Where is he?

ELIZABETH. I don't know. I suppose he's in his room.

[*Sits right of card-table.*

[ARNOLD *rings and goes to door up right and calls.*

[*He comes centre.*

ARNOLD. George!

[ELIZABETH *watches him.* *The* FOOTMAN *comes in door up right.*

FOOTMAN. Yes, sir?

ARNOLD. Tell Mr Luton to come here at once.

[FOOTMAN *astonished.*

ELIZABETH. Ask Mr Luton if he wouldn't mind coming here for a moment. [ARNOLD *goes down left.*

FOOTMAN. Very good, madam. [*Exit* FOOTMAN.

[ARNOLD *goes up centre.*

ELIZABETH. What are you going to say to him?

ARNOLD. That's my business.

ELIZABETH. I wouldn't make a scene, if I were you.

ARNOLD. I'm not going to make a scene. Why did you insist on my mother coming here?

ELIZABETH. It seemed to me rather absurd to take up the attitude that I should be contaminated by her, when . . .

ARNOLD [*interrupting*]. When you were proposing to do exactly the same thing. Well, now you've seen her, what do you think of her? Do you think it's been a success? Is that the sort of woman a man would like his mother to be?

ELIZABETH. I've been ashamed. I've been so sorry. It all seemed dreadful and horrible. This morning I happened to notice a rose in the garden. It was all overblown and bedraggled. It looked like a painted old woman. And I remembered that I'd looked at it a day or two ago. It was lovely then, fresh and blooming and fragrant. It may be hideous now, but that doesn't take away from the beauty it had once. That was real.

ARNOLD [*comes down left*]. Poetry, by God! As if this were the moment for poetry.

[TEDDIE *comes in door up right. He has changed into a dinner-jacket.*

TEDDIE [*to* ELIZABETH]. Did you want me?

ARNOLD. *I* sent for you. [TEDDIE *looks from* ARNOLD *to* ELIZABETH. *He sees that something has happened. The light gradually fades at this point.*] When would it be convenient for you to leave this house?

TEDDIE. I was proposing to go to-morrow morning. But I can very well go at once, if you like.

ARNOLD. I do like.

TEDDIE. Very well. Is there anything else you wish to say to me?

ARNOLD. Do you think it was a very honourable thing to come down here and make love to my wife?

TEDDIE. No, I don't. I haven't been very happy about it. That's why I wanted to go away.

ARNOLD. Upon my word, you're cool.

TEDDIE. I'm afraid it's no good saying I'm sorry and that sort of thing. You know what the situation is.

ARNOLD. Is it true that you want to marry Elizabeth?

TEDDIE. Yes. I should like to marry her as soon as ever I can.

ARNOLD. Have you thought of me, at all? Has it struck you that you're destroying my home and breaking up my happiness?

TEDDIE. I don't see how there could be much happiness for you if Elizabeth doesn't care for you.

ARNOLD [*goes to him*]. Let me tell you that I refuse to have my home broken up by a twopenny-halfpenny adventurer who takes advantage of a foolish woman. I refuse to allow myself to be divorced. I can't prevent my wife from going off with you if she's determined to make a damned fool of herself, but this I tell you: nothing will induce me to divorce her.

ELIZABETH. Arnold, that would be monstrous.

TEDDIE. We could force you.

ARNOLD. How?

TEDDIE. If we went away together openly you'd have to bring an action.

ARNOLD. Twenty-four hours after you leave this house I shall go down to Brighton with some chorus-girl. And then neither you nor I will be able to get a divorce. We've had enough divorces in our family. And now get out, get out! [*Goes left.*

[TEDDIE *looks uncertainly at* ELIZABETH.

ELIZABETH [*with a little smile*]. Don't bother about me. I shall be all right.

ARNOLD. Get out! Get out! Get out!

[TEDDIE *goes up centre, still looking at* ELIZABETH, *as the curtain falls.*

## ACT III

SCENE: *The scene is the same as in the preceding Acts. It is the night of the same day as that on which takes place the action of the Second Act. The curtains at centre and left windows are drawn.*

CHAMPION-CHENEY *and* ARNOLD, *both in dinner-jackets, are discovered.* CHAMPION-CHENEY *is seated by table up centre.* ARNOLD *walks restlessly up and down the room.*

CLIVE. I think if you'll follow my advice to the letter, you'll probably work the trick.

ARNOLD. I don't like it, you know. It's against all my principles.

CLIVE. My dear Arnold, we all hope that you have before you a distinguished political career. You can't learn too soon that the most useful thing about a principle is that it can always be sacrificed to expediency.

ARNOLD. But supposing it doesn't come off? Women are incalculable.

CLIVE. Nonsense! Women are romantic. A woman will always sacrifice herself if you give her the opportunity. It is her favourite form of self-indulgence.

ARNOLD. I never know whether you're a humorist or a cynic, Father.

CLIVE. I'm neither, my dear boy; I'm merely a very truthful man. But people are so unused to the truth that they're apt to mistake it for a joke or a sneer.

ARNOLD [*irritably*]. It seems so unfair that this should happen to me.

CLIVE. Keep your head, my boy, and do what I tell you.

ARNOLD. I don't like it, you know, but I'll do anything rather than lose her.

CLIVE. Then all you have to do is to go to Elizabeth and tell her she can have her freedom. Sacrifice yourself all along the line. I know what women are. The moment every obstacle is removed half the allurement will be gone. [*Rises*

[LADY KITTY *and* ELIZABETH *come in up right.* LADY KITTY *is in a gorgeous evening-gown.*

ELIZABETH. Where is Lord Porteous?

CLIVE. He's on the terrace. He's smoking a cigar. [*Going to window right*] Hughie. [PORTEOUS *comes in.*

PORTEOUS [*with a grunt*]. Where's Mrs Shenstone?

ELIZABETH. Oh, she had a headache. She's gone to bed.

[*When* PORTEOUS *comes in* LADY KITTY, *with a very haughty air, purses her lips and takes up an illustrated paper, and goes to settee—sits.* PORTEOUS *watches her, takes "The Times," shakes it as he gets centre, and sits himself on stool, opening paper viciously. They are not on speaking terms.*

CLIVE [*takes album from table*]. Arnold and I have just been down to my cottage.

ELIZABETH. I wondered where you'd gone.

CLIVE. I came across an old photograph album this afternoon. I meant to bring it along before dinner, but I forgot, so we went and fetched it.

ELIZABETH. Oh, do let me see it. I love old photographs.

[*He gives her the album, and she, sitting down up centre, puts it on her knees and begins to turn over the pages. He stands over her.* LADY KITTY *and* PORTEOUS *take surreptitious glances at one another.*

CLIVE. I thought it might amuse you to see what pretty women looked like five-and-thirty years ago. That was the day of beautiful women.

ELIZABETH. Do you think they were more beautiful then than they are now?

CLIVE. Oh, much. [LORD PORTEOUS *and* LADY KITTY *exchange looks.*] Now you see lots of pretty little things, but very few beautiful women.

ELIZABETH. Aren't their clothes funny?

CLIVE [*pointing to a photograph*]. That's Mrs Langtry.

ELIZABETH. She has a lovely nose.

CLIVE. She was the most wonderful thing you ever saw. Dowagers used to jump on chairs in order to get a good look at her when she came into a drawing-room.

ELIZABETH. And who's that?

CLIVE. Lady Lonsdale. That's Lady Dudley.

ELIZABETH. This is an actress, isn't it?

CLIVE. It is, indeed. Ellen Terry. By George, how I loved that woman!

ELIZABETH [*with a smile*]. Dear Ellen Terry—and this?

CLIVE. That's Mrs Wheeler.

ELIZABETH. I think it's too sweet. I love their absurd bustles and those tight sleeves.

CLIVE. What figures they had! In those days a woman wasn't supposed to be as thin as a rail and as flat as a pancake.

[LORD PORTEOUS *and* LADY KITTY *again look.*

ELIZABETH. Oh, but aren't they laced in? How could they bear it?

CLIVE. They didn't play golf then, and nonsense like that, you know. They hunted, in a tall hat and a long black habit, and they were very gracious and charitable to the poor in the village.

ELIZABETH. Did the poor like it?

CLIVE. They had a very thin time if they didn't.

ELIZABETH. Oh, what a lovely little thing! Who on earth is that?

CLIVE. That?

ELIZABETH. She looks so fragile, like a piece of exquisite china, with all those furs on and her face up against her muff, and the snow falling.

CLIVE. Yes, there was quite a rage at that time for being taken in an artificial snowstorm.

ELIZABETH. What a sweet smile, so roguish and frank, and debonair. Oh, I wish I looked like that. Do tell me who it is.

CLIVE. Don't you know?

ELIZABETH. No.

CLIVE. Why—it's Kitty.

ELIZABETH. Lady Kitty. [*To* LADY KITTY] Oh, my dear, do look, it's too ravishing. [*She takes the album over to her impulsively.*] Why

didn't you tell me you looked like that? Everybody must have bee in love with you.

[LADY KITTY *takes the album and looks at it. Then she cover her face with her left hand. She is crying.* CLIVE *move chair up centre under table.*

[*In consternation*] My dear, what's the matter? Oh, what have I done I'm so sorry.

LADY KITTY. Don't, don't talk to me. Leave me alone. It's stupi of me.

[ELIZABETH *looks at her for a moment, perplexed, then, turnin round, slips her arm in* CHAMPION-CHENEY'S *and leads hi out on to the terrace.*

ELIZABETH [*as they are going*]. Did you do that on purpose?

[PORTEOUS *tiptoes to window—comes to table centre, and put down paper and cigar, and goes over to* LADY KITTY. *H puts his hand on her shoulder.*

PORTEOUS. I'm afraid I was very rude to you before dinner, Kitty.

LADY KITTY [*taking his hand which is on her shoulder*]. It doesn matter. I'm sure I was very exasperating.

PORTEOUS [*sits*]. I didn't mean what I said, you know.

LADY KITTY. Neither did I.

PORTEOUS. Of course, I know that I'd never have been Prime Minister

LADY KITTY. How can you talk such nonsense, Hughie? No on would have had a chance if you'd remained in politics.

PORTEOUS. I haven't the character.

LADY KITTY. You have more character than anyone I've ever met.

PORTEOUS. Besides, I don't know that I much wanted to be Prime Minister.

LADY KITTY. Oh, but I should have been so proud of you. O course you'd have been Prime Minister.

PORTEOUS. I'd have given you India, you know. I think it would have been a very popular appointment.

LADY KITTY [*she turns, smiling, and sees he is looking away*]. I don't care twopence about India. I'd have been quite content with Western Australia.

PORTEOUS. My dear, you don't think I'd have let you bury yourself in Western Australia?

LADY KITTY. Or Barbados.

PORTEOUS. Never. Sounds like a cure for flat feet. I'd have kept you in London.

[*She turns to him. He takes the album and is about to look a the photograph of* LADY KITTY. *She puts her hand over it.*

LADY KITTY. No, don't look.

PORTEOUS [*he takes her hand away*]. Don't be silly.

LADY KITTY. Isn't it hateful to grow old?

PORTEOUS. You know, you haven't changed much.

LADY KITTY [*enchanted*]. Oh, Hughie, how can you talk such nonsense?

PORTEOUS. Of course, you're a little more mature, but that's all. A woman's all the better for being rather mature.

LADY KITTY. Do you really think that?

PORTEOUS. Upon my soul, I do.

LADY KITTY. You're not saying it just to please me?

PORTEOUS. No, no.

LADY KITTY. Let me look at the photograph again. [*She takes the album and looks at the photograph complacently.*] The fact is, if your bones are good age doesn't really matter. You'll always be beautiful.

[*She closes the book and puts it behind cushion of settee.*

PORTEOUS [*almost as if he were talking to a child*]. It was silly of you to cry.

LADY KITTY. It hasn't made my eyelashes run, has it?

PORTEOUS. Not a bit.

LADY KITTY. It's very good stuff I use now. They don't stick together, either.

PORTEOUS. Look here, Kitty, how much longer do you want to stay here?

LADY KITTY. Oh, I'm quite ready to go whenever you like.

PORTEOUS. Clive's getting on my nerves. I don't like the way he keeps hanging about you.

LADY KITTY [*surprised, rather amused, and delighted*]. Hughie, you don't mean to say you're jealous of poor Clive? [*Sits back.*

PORTEOUS. Of course I'm not jealous of him, but he does look at you in a way that I can't help thinking rather objectionable.

LADY KITTY. Hughie, you may throw me downstairs like Amy Robsart, you may drag me about the floor by the hair of my head, I don't care, you're jealous. I shall never grow old.

PORTEOUS. Damn it all, the man *was* your husband.

LADY KITTY. My dear Hughie, he never had your style. Why, the moment you come into a room every one looks and says: "Who the devil is that?"

PORTEOUS. What? You think that, do you? Well, I dare say there's something in what you say. These damned Radicals can say what they like, but, by God! Kitty, when a man's a gentleman—well, damn it all! you know what I mean.

LADY KITTY [*comes closer to him*]. I think Clive has degenerated dreadfully since we left him.

PORTEOUS [*edging towards her—takes her hand*]. What do you say to making a bee-line for Italy and going to San Michele?

LADY KITTY. Oh, Hughie! It's years since we were there.

PORTEOUS. Wouldn't you like to see it again—just once more?

LADY KITTY. Do you remember the first time we went? It was the most heavenly place I'd ever seen. We'd only left England a month, and I said I'd like to spend all my life there.

PORTEOUS. Of course I remember. And in a fortnight it was yours, lock, stock, and barrel.

LADY KITTY. We were very happy there, Hughie.

PORTEOUS. Let's go back once more. [*Kisses her hand.*

LADY KITTY [*withdrawing hand*]. I daren't. It must be all peopled with the ghosts of our past. One should never go again to a place where one has been happy. It would break my heart.

PORTEOUS. Do you remember how we used to sit on the terrace of the old castle and look at the Adriatic? We might have been the only people in the world, you and I, Kitty.

LADY KITTY [*tragically*]. And we thought our love would last for ever.

[*Their heads droop.* CHAMPION-CHENEY *is seen at window.* PORTEOUS *rises, crosses right.* CHAMPION-CHENEY *enters.*

PORTEOUS. Is there any chance of bridge this evening?

CLIVE. I don't think we can make up a four.

PORTEOUS. Nuisance that boy went away like that. He wasn't a bad player.

CLIVE. Teddie Luton?

LADY KITTY. I think it was very funny his going without saying good-bye to anyone.

CLIVE. The young men of the present day are very casual.

PORTEOUS. I thought there was no train in the evening.

CLIVE. There isn't. The last train leaves at 5.45.

PORTEOUS. How did he go, then?

CLIVE. He went.

PORTEOUS. Damned selfish, I call it.

LADY KITTY [*intrigued*]. Why did he go, Clive?

[CHAMPION-CHENEY *looks at her for a moment reflectively and goes to her.*

CLIVE. I have something very grave to say to you. [LORD PORTEOUS *moves to centre.*] Elizabeth wants to leave Arnold.

LADY KITTY [*rises*]. Clive! What on earth for?

CLIVE. She's fallen in love with Teddie Luton. That's why he went. The men of my family are really very unfortunate.

PORTEOUS. Does she want to run away with him?

LADY KITTY [*with consternation*]. My dear, what's to be done?

CLIVE. I think you can do a great deal.

LADY KITTY. I? What?

CLIVE. Tell her, tell her what it means.

[*He looks at her fixedly. She stares at him.*

LADY KITTY. Oh, no, no!

CLIVE. She's a child. Not for Arnold's sake. For her sake. [*She shakes her head.*] You must.

LADY KITTY. You don't know what you're asking.

CLIVE. Yes, I do.

LADY KITTY. Hughie, what shall I do?

PORTEOUS. Do what you like. I shall never blame you for anything.

[*The* FOOTMAN *comes in up right with a letter on a salver. He hesitates on seeing that* ELIZABETH *is not in the room.*

CLIVE. What is it?

FOOTMAN. I was looking for Mrs Champion-Cheney, sir.

CLIVE. She's not here. Is that a letter?

FOOTMAN. Yes, sir. It's just been sent up from the Champion Arms.

CLIVE. Leave it. I'll give it to Mrs Cheney.

FOOTMAN. Very good, sir.

[*He brings the tray to* CLIVE, *who takes letter. The* FOOTMAN *goes out.*

PORTEOUS. Is the Champion Arms the local pub?

CLIVE [*looking at the letter*]. It's by way of being a hotel, but I never heard of anyone staying there.

LADY KITTY. If there was no train I suppose he had to go there.

CLIVE. Great minds. I wonder what he has to write about. [*He goes to the window right, leading on to the garden.*] Elizabeth, Elizabeth!

[LORD PORTEOUS *and* LADY KITTY *look at each other.*

ELIZABETH [*outside*]. Yes?

CLIVE. Here's a note for you. [*Comes down to* LADY KITTY.

[*There is silence. They wait for* ELIZABETH *to come. She enters from garden up right.*

ELIZABETH. It's lovely in the garden to-night.

CLIVE. They've just sent this up from the Champion Arms.

ELIZABETH. Thank you. [*Without embarrassment she opens the letter.*

[*They watch her while she reads it. It covers three pages.*

LADY KITTY. Hughie, I wish you'd fetch me a cloak. I'd like to take a little stroll in the garden, but after thirty years in Italy I find these English summers rather chilly.

PORTEOUS. Certainly, my dear, certainly. [*Exit door up right.*

[ELIZABETH *is lost in thought.*

LADY KITTY. I want to talk to Elizabeth, Clive.

CLIVE. I'll leave you. [*He goes out door up right.*

LADY KITTY. What does he say?

ELIZABETH. Who?

LADY KITTY. Mr Luton.

ELIZABETH [*gives a little start; then she looks at* LADY KITTY]. They've told you?

LADY KITTY. Yes. And now they have, I think I knew it all along.

ELIZABETH. I don't expect you to have much sympathy for me. Arnold is your son.

LADY KITTY. So pitifully little.

ELIZABETH. I'm not suited to this sort of existence. Arnold wants me to take what he calls my place in Society. Oh, I get so bored with those parties in London. All those middle-aged painted women, in beautiful clothes, lolloping round ballrooms with rather old young men. And the endless luncheons where they gossip about so-and-so's love affairs. [*Sits on stool.*

LADY KITTY [*goes to her*]. Are you very much in love with Mr Luton?

ELIZABETH. I love him with all my heart.

LADY KITTY. And he?

ELIZABETH. He's never cared for anyone but me. He never will.

LADY KITTY. Will Arnold let you divorce him?

ELIZABETH. No, he won't hear of it. He refuses even to divorce me.

LADY KITTY. Why?

ELIZABETH. He thinks a scandal will revive all the old gossip.

LADY KITTY. Oh, my poor child!

ELIZABETH. It can't be helped. I'm quite willing to accept the consequences.

LADY KITTY [*sits beside her*]. You don't know what it is to have a man tied to you only by his honour. When married people don't get on they can separate; but if they're not married it's impossible. It's a tie that only death can sever.

ELIZABETH. If Teddie stopped caring for me, I shouldn't want him to stay with me for five minutes.

LADY KITTY. One says that when one's sure of a man's love, but when one isn't any more—oh, it's so different! In those circumstances one's got to keep a man's love. It's the only thing one has.

ELIZABETH [*rises*]. I'm a human being. I can stand on my own feet.

LADY KITTY. Have you any money of your own?

ELIZABETH. None.

LADY KITTY. Then how can you stand on your own feet? You think I'm a silly, frivolous woman, but I've learnt something in a bitter school. They can make what laws they like; they can give us the suffrage, but when you come down to bedrock, it's the man who pays the piper who calls the tune. Woman will only be the equal of man when she earns her living in the same way that he does.

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. It sounds rather funny to hear you talk like this.

LADY KITTY. A cook who marries a butler can snap her fingers in his face because she can earn just as much as he can. But a woman in your position, and a woman in mine, will always be dependent on the men who keep them.

ELIZABETH. I don't want luxury. You don't know how sick I am of all this beautiful furniture. These over-decorated houses are like a prison in which I can't breathe. When I drive about in a Callot frock and a Rolls-Royce I envy the shop-girls in a coat and skirt jumping on the tailboard of a bus.

LADY KITTY. You mean that, if need be, you could earn your own living?

ELIZABETH. Yes.

LADY KITTY. What could you be? A nurse or a typist? It's nonsense. Luxury saps a woman's nerve. And when she's known it once it becomes a necessity.

ELIZABETH. That depends on the woman.

LADY KITTY. When we're young we think we're different from every one else, but when we grow older we discover we're all very much of a muchness.

ELIZABETH [*goes to her*]. You're very kind to take so much trouble about me.

LADY KITTY [*touches her hand*]. It breaks my heart to think that you're going to make the same pitiful mistake that I made.

ELIZABETH. Oh, don't say it was that, don't, don't.

LADY KITTY. Look at me, Elizabeth, and look at Hughie. Do you think it's been a success? If I had my time over again do you think I'd *do* it again? Do you think he would?

ELIZABETH [*turns away*]. You see, you don't know how much I love Teddie.

LADY KITTY. And do you think I didn't love Hughie? Do you think he didn't love me?

ELIZABETH. I'm sure he did.

LADY KITTY. Oh, of course in the beginning it was heavenly; we felt so brave and adventurous, and we were so much in love. The first two years were wonderful. People cut me, you know, but I didn't mind. I thought love was everything. [*Rises.*] It *is* a little uncomfortable when you come upon an old friend and go towards her eagerly, so glad to see her, and are met with an icy stare.

ELIZABETH [*goes to settee, sits*]. Do you think friends like that are worth having?

LADY KITTY [*goes to chair by settee*]. Perhaps they're not very sure of themselves. Perhaps they're honestly shocked. It's a test one had better not put one's friends to if one can help it. It's rather bitter to find how few one has. [*Sits.*

ELIZABETH. But one has some.

LADY KITTY. Yes; they ask you to come and see them when they're quite certain no one will be there who might object to meeting you. Or else they say to you: "My dear, you know I'm devoted to you, and I wouldn't mind at all, but my girl's growing up—I'm sure you understand; you won't think it unkind of me if I don't ask you to the house."

ELIZABETH [*smiling*]. That doesn't seem to me very serious.

LADY KITTY. At first I thought it rather a relief, because it threw Hughie and me together more. But, you know, men are very funny. Even when they are in love they're not in love all day long. They want change and recreation.

ELIZABETH. I'm not inclined to blame them for that, poor dears.

LADY KITTY. Then we settled in Florence. And because we couldn't get the society we'd been used to we became used to the society we could get. Loose women and vicious men. Snobs who liked to patronize people with a handle to their names. And then Hughie began to hanker after his old life. He wanted to go big-game shooting, but I dared not let him go. I was afraid he'd never come back.

ELIZABETH. But you knew he loved you.

LADY KITTY. Oh, my dear, what a blessed institution marriage is—for women, and what fools they are to meddle with it. The Church is so wise to take its stand on the indi—indi——

ELIZABETH. —solu——

LADY KITTY. —bility of marriage. Believe me, it's no joke when you have to rely only on yourself to keep a man. I could never afford to grow old. [*Rises—goes to her, sits.*] My dear, I'll tell you a secret that I've never told a living soul.

ELIZABETH. What is that?

LADY KITTY. My hair is not naturally this colour.

ELIZABETH. Really!

LADY KITTY. I touch it up. You would never have guessed, would you?

ELIZABETH. Never.

LADY KITTY. Nobody does. My dear, it's white; prematurely, of course; but white. I always think it's a symbol of my life. Are you interested in symbolism? I think it's too wonderful.

ELIZABETH. I don't think I know very much about it.

LADY KITTY. However tired I've been, I've had to be brilliant and gay. I've never let Hughie see the aching heart behind my smiling eyes.

ELIZABETH [*amused and touched*]. You poor dear.

LADY KITTY. And when I saw he was attracted by some one else, the fear and the jealousy that seized me! You see, I didn't dare make a

scene as I should have done if I'd been married—I had to pretend not to notice.

ELIZABETH [*taken aback*]. Do you mean to say he fell in love with anyone else?

LADY KITTY. Of course he did eventually.

ELIZABETH [*hardly knowing what to say*]. You must have been very unhappy.

LADY KITTY. Oh, I was dreadfully. Night after night I sobbed my heart out when Hughie told me he was going to play cards at the club, and I knew he was with that odious woman.

ELIZABETH [*hoarsely*]. Oh, but I think that's—dreadful.

LADY KITTY. You are shocked? One sacrifices one's life for love, and then one finds that love doesn't last. The tragedy of love isn't death or separation. One gets over them. The tragedy of love is indifference. [ARNOLD *comes in double doors right.*

ARNOLD. May I have a little talk with you, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. Of course.

ARNOLD. Shall we go into the garden?

ELIZABETH [*rises*]. If you like.

LADY KITTY [*rises*]. No, stay here. I'm going out, anyway.

[*Exit* LADY KITTY, *double doors right*, ARNOLD *opening and closing them.*

ARNOLD. I want to ask you if you've quite made up your mind to go?

ELIZABETH. Quite.

ARNOLD. Just now I seem to have said everything that I didn't want to say, and nothing that I did. I'm stupid and tongue-tied. I never told you how deeply I loved you.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold!

ARNOLD. Please let me speak now. It's so very difficult. If I seemed absorbed in politics and the house and so on, to the exclusion of my interest in you, I'm dreadfully sorry. I suppose it was absurd of me to expect you to take my great love for granted.

ELIZABETH. But, Arnold, I'm not reproaching you.

ARNOLD. I'm reproaching myself. I've been tactless and neglectful. It wasn't till to-day, when you talked of leaving me, that I realized how desperately in love with you I was.

ELIZABETH. After three years?

ARNOLD. I'm so proud of you. I admire you so much. When I see you at a party, so fresh and lovely, and everybody wondering at you, I have a sort of little thrill because you're mine, and afterwards I shall take you home.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold, you're exaggerating.

ARNOLD. I can't imagine this house without you. Life seems on a

sudden all empty and meaningless. Oh, Elizabeth, don't you love me at all?

ELIZABETH. It's much better to be honest. No. Oh, Arnold, believe me, I have tried to make the best of it. I've tried to love you, but I can't. After all, one either loves or one doesn't. Trying is no help. And now I'm finished. I can't help the consequences—I must do what my whole self yearns for. [*Sits in settee.*

ARNOLD. My poor child, I'm so afraid you'll be unhappy. I'm so afraid you'll regret.

ELIZABETH. You must leave me to my fate. I hope you'll forget me and all the unhappiness I've caused you. [*There is a pause.*

ARNOLD [*he walks up centre, looks at doors and then at her*]. If you love this man and want to go to him, I'll do nothing to prevent you. My only wish is to do what is best for you.

ELIZABETH. Arnold, that's awfully kind of you. If I'm treating you badly, at least I want you to know that I'm grateful for all your kindness to me.

ARNOLD. But there's one favour I should like you to do me. Will you? [*Sits on chair by settee.*

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold, of course I'll do anything I can.

ARNOLD. Teddie hasn't very much money. You've been used to a certain amount of luxury, and I can't bear to think that you should do without anything you've had.

ELIZABETH. Oh, but Teddie can earn enough for our needs. After all, we shan't want very much money.

ARNOLD. I'm afraid my mother's life hasn't been very easy, but it's obvious that the only thing that's made it possible is that Porteous was rich. I want you to let me make you an allowance of two thousand a year.

ELIZABETH. Oh, no, I couldn't think of it. It's absurd.

ARNOLD. I beg you to accept it. You don't know what a difference it will make.

ELIZABETH. It's awfully kind of you, Arnold. It humiliates me to speak about it. Nothing would induce me to take a penny from you. [*Rises—goes to fireplace.*

ARNOLD [*rises, goes centre*]. Well, you can't prevent my opening an account at my bank, in your name. The money shall be paid in every quarter whether you touch it or not, and if you happen to want it, it will be there waiting for you.

ELIZABETH. You overwhelm me, Arnold. There's only one thing I want you to do for me. I should be very grateful if you would divorce me as soon as you possibly can.

ARNOLD. No, I'll never do that. But I'll give you cause to divorce me.

ELIZABETH. You!

ARNOLD. Yes. But, of course, you'll have to be very careful for a bit. I'll put it through as quickly as possible, but I'm afraid you can't hope to be free for over six months.

ELIZABETH [*comes to him*]. But, Arnold, your seat, and your political career?

ARNOLD [*goes down right*]. Oh, well, my father gave up his seat under similar circumstances. He's got along very comfortably without politics.

ELIZABETH. But they're your whole life.

ARNOLD. After all, one can't have it both ways. You can't serve God and Mammon. If you want to do the decent thing, you have to be prepared to suffer for it.

ELIZABETH. But I don't want you to suffer for it.

ARNOLD. At first I rather hesitated at the scandal. [*Sits on stool.*] But I dare say that was only weakness on my part. Under the circumstances I should have liked to keep you out of the Divorce Court if possible.

ELIZABETH. Arnold, you're making me absolutely miserable.

ARNOLD [*looks at her before speaking*]. What you said before dinner was quite right. It's nothing for a man, but it makes so much difference to a woman. Naturally, I must think of you first.

ELIZABETH. That's absurd. It's out of the question. If there's anything to pay, I must pay it.

ARNOLD. It's not very much I'm asking you, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I'm taking everything from you.

ARNOLD [*rises*]. It's the only condition I make. My mind is absolutely made up. I will never divorce you, but I will enable you to divorce me.

ELIZABETH. Oh, Arnold. It's cruel to be so generous.

ARNOLD [*goes to her*]. It's not generous, at all. It's the only way I have of showing you how deep and passionate and sincere my love is for you. [*There is a silence. He holds out his hand.*] Good night. I have a great deal of work to do before I go to bed.

ELIZABETH. Good night.

ARNOLD. Do you mind if I kiss you?

ELIZABETH [*with agony*]. Oh, Arnold!

[*He gravely kisses her on the forehead, and then goes out double doors, looking back at her.*

[ELIZABETH *stands lost in thought. She tears up letter, goes to fireplace and drops it, sobbing.* LADY KITTY *and* PORTEOUS *come in door up right.* LADY KITTY *wears a cloak.*

LADY KITTY. You're alone, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH. That note you asked me about, Lady Kitty, from Teddie . . .

LADY KITTY. Yes?

ELIZABETH. He wanted to have a talk with me before he went away. He's waiting for me in the summer-house by the tennis-court. Would Lord Porteous mind going down and asking him to come here?

PORTEOUS. Certainly, my dear, certainly.

ELIZABETH. Forgive me for troubling you. But it's very important.

PORTEOUS. No trouble at all. No trouble at all.

[*He goes out window up right and off left.*

LADY KITTY. Hughie and I will leave you alone.

ELIZABETH [*goes to her—takes her hand*]. But I don't want to be left alone. I want you to stay.

LADY KITTY. What are you going to say to him?

ELIZABETH [*desperately*]. Please don't ask me questions. I'm so desperately unhappy. [*Goes to settee, sits.*

LADY KITTY. My poor child. [*Goes to her.*

ELIZABETH. Oh, isn't life rotten? Why can't one be happy without making other people unhappy?

LADY KITTY [*sits*]. I wish I knew how to help you. I'm simply devoted to you. [*She hunts about in her mind for something to do or say.*] Would you like my lipstick?

ELIZABETH [*smiling through her tears*]. Thanks. I never use one.

LADY KITTY. Oh, but just try. It's such a comfort when you're in trouble.

[ELIZABETH *rises. Enter* PORTEOUS *and* TEDDIE *by window up right.*

PORTEOUS. I brought him. He said he'd be damned if he'd come.

LADY KITTY. When a lady sent for him? Are these the manners of the young men of to-day?

TEDDIE. When you've been solemnly kicked out of a house once, I think it seems rather pushing to come back again as though nothing had happened.

ELIZABETH [*crosses centre*]. Teddie, I want you to be serious.

TEDDIE. Darling, I had such a rotten dinner at that pub. If you ask me to be serious on the top of that I shall cry.

ELIZABETH. Don't be idiotic, Teddie. [*Her voice faltering*]. I'm so utterly wretched. [*He looks at her for a moment gravely.*

TEDDIE. What is it?

ELIZABETH. I can't come away with you, Teddie.

TEDDIE. Why not?

ELIZABETH [*looking away in embarrassment*]. I don't love you enough.

TEDDIE. Fiddle!

ELIZABETH [*with a flash of anger*]. Don't say fiddle to me.

TEDDIE. I shall say exactly what I like to you.

ELIZABETH. I won't be bullied.

TEDDIE. Now look here, Elizabeth, you know perfectly well that I'm in love with you, and I know perfectly well that you're in love with me. So what are you talking nonsense for?

ELIZABETH [*her voice breaking*]. I can't say it if you're cross with me.

TEDDIE [*smiling very tenderly*]. I'm not cross with you, silly.

ELIZABETH. It's harder still when you're being rather an owl.

TEDDIE. Am I mistaken in thinking you're not very easy to please?

ELIZABETH. Oh, it's monstrous. I was all wrought up and ready to do anything, and now you've thoroughly put me out. I feel like a great big fat balloon that some one has put a long pin into. [*With a sudden look at him*] Have you done it on purpose?

TEDDIE. Upon my soul, I don't know what you're talking about.

ELIZABETH. I wonder if you're really much cleverer than I think you are.

[TEDDIE *taking her hands and making her sit down on stool. He sits.*

TEDDIE. Now, tell me exactly what you want to say. By the way, do you want Lady Kitty and Lord Porteous to be here?

ELIZABETH. Yes.

LADY KITTY. Elizabeth asked us to stay.

TEDDIE. Oh, I don't mind, bless you. I only thought you might feel rather in the way.

LADY KITTY [*frigidly*]. A gentlewoman never feels in the way, Mr Luton.

TEDDIE. Won't you call me Teddie? Every one does, you know.

[LADY KITTY *tries to give him a withering look, but she finds it very difficult to prevent herself from smiling.* TEDDIE *kisses* ELIZABETH'S *hand. She draws it away.*

ELIZABETH. No, don't do that. Teddie, it wasn't true when I said I didn't love you. Of course I love you. But Arnold loves me too. I didn't know how much.

TEDDIE. What has he been saying to you?

ELIZABETH. He's been very good to me, and so kind. I didn't know he could be so kind. He offered to let me divorce him.

TEDDIE. That's very decent of him.

ELIZABETH. But, don't you see, it ties my hands. How can I accept such a sacrifice? I should never forgive myself if I profited by his generosity.

TEDDIE. If another man and I were devilish hungry and there was only one mutton chop between us and he said: "You eat it"—I wouldn't waste a lot of time arguing. I'd wolf it before he changed his mind.

ELIZABETH. Don't talk like that. It maddens me. I'm trying to do the right thing.

TEDDIE. You're not in love with Arnold; you're in love with me. It's idiotic to sacrifice your life for a slushy sentiment.

ELIZABETH. After all, I did marry him.

TEDDIE. Well, you made a mistake. A marriage without love is no marriage at all.

ELIZABETH. *I* made the mistake. Why should he suffer for it? If anyone has to suffer, it's only right that I should.

TEDDIE. What sort of life do you think it would be with him? When two people are married it's very difficult for one of them to be unhappy without making the other unhappy too.

ELIZABETH. I can't take advantage of his generosity.

TEDDIE. I dare say he'll get a lot of satisfaction out of it.

ELIZABETH. You're being beastly, Teddie. He was simply wonderful. I didn't know he had it in him. He was really noble.

TEDDIE. You are talking rot, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I wonder if you'd be capable of acting like that.

TEDDIE. Acting like that?

ELIZABETH. What would you do if I were married to *you*, and came and told you I loved somebody else, and wanted to leave you?

TEDDIE. You have very pretty blue eyes, Elizabeth. I'd black first one and then the other. And after that, we'd see.

ELIZABETH. You damned brute!

TEDDIE. I've often thought I wasn't quite a gentleman. Had it ever struck you? [*They look at one another for a while.*

ELIZABETH. You know, you are taking an unfair advantage of me. I feel as if I came to you quite unsuspectingly and when I wasn't looking you kicked me on the shins.

TEDDIE. Don't you think we'd get on rather well together?

[TEDDIE *rises and, watching* PORTEOUS, *goes to centre.*

PORTEOUS. Elizabeth's a fool if she don't stick to her husband. It's bad enough for the man, but for the woman—it's damnable. I hold no brief for Arnold. He plays bridge like a fool, and, saving your presence, Kitty, I think he's a prig.

LADY KITTY. Poor dear, his father was at his age. I dare say he'll grow out of it.

PORTEOUS. But you stick to him, Elizabeth, stick to him. Man is a gregarious animal. We're members of a herd. If we break the herd's laws we suffer for it. And we suffer damnably. [*Sits by* LADY KITTY.

LADY KITTY. Oh, Elizabeth, my dear child, don't go. It's not worth it. It's not worth it. I tell you that, and I've sacrificed everything to love. [*A pause.*

ELIZABETH [*rises*]. I'm afraid.

TEDDIE [*in a whisper*]. Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. I can't face it. It's asking too much of me. Let's say

good-bye to one another, Teddie. It's the only thing to do. And have pity on me. I'm giving up all my hope of happiness.

[*He comes down to her.*

TEDDIE. But I wasn't offering you happiness. I don't think my sort of life tends to happiness. I'm jealous. I'm not a very easy man to get on with. I'm often out of temper and irritable. I should be fed to the teeth with you sometimes, and so would you be with me. I dare say we'd fight like cat and dog—[*she turns to face him*] and sometimes we'd hate each other. Often you'd be wretched and bored stiff and lonely, and often you'd be frightfully homesick, and then you'd regret all you'd lost. Stupid women would be rude to you because we'd run away together. And some of them would cut you. I don't offer you peace and quietness. I offer you unrest and anxiety. I don't offer you happiness; I offer you love.

ELIZABETH [*stretching out her arms*]. You hateful creature, I absolutely adore you.

[*He throws his arms round her and kisses her passionately on the lips.*

LADY KITTY. Of course, the moment he said he'd give her a black eye I knew it was finished.

PORTEOUS [*good-humouredly*]. You are a fool, Kitty.

LADY KITTY [*wiping her eyes*]. I know I am, but I can't help it.

TEDDIE. Let's make a bolt for it now.

ELIZABETH. Shall we?

TEDDIE. This minute.

PORTEOUS. You're damned fools, both of you, damned fools! If you ike you can have my car.

TEDDIE. That's awfully kind of you. As a matter of fact, I got it ut of the garage. It's just along the drive.

PORTEOUS [*indignantly*]. How do you mean, you got it out of the arage?

TEDDIE. Well, I thought there'd be a lot of bother, and it seemed to ne the best thing would be for Elizabeth and me not to stand upon he order of our going, you know. Do it now. An excellent motto or a business man.

PORTEOUS [*rises and goes to him*]. Do you mean to say you were going o steal my car?

TEDDIE. Not exactly. I was only going to bolshevize it, so to speak.

[LADY KITTY *rises.*

PORTEOUS. I'm speechless. I'm absolutely speechless.

TEDDIE. Hang it all, I couldn't carry Elizabeth all the way to London. he's so damned plump.

PORTEOUS [*spluttering*]. Well, well, well. . . . [*Holding up his teeth*] like him, Kitty, it's no good pretending I don't. I like him.

TEDDIE. The moon's shining, Elizabeth. We'll drive all through the night.

PORTEOUS. They'd better go to San Michele. I'll wire to have it got ready for them.

LADY KITTY. That's where we went when Hughie and I . . [*Faltering*] You, you dear things, how I envy you!

PORTEOUS [*mopping his eyes*]. Now, don't cry, Kitty. Confound you don't cry.

TEDDIE. Come, darling.

ELIZABETH. But I can't go like this.

TEDDIE. Nonsense. Lady Kitty will lend you her cloak.

LADY KITTY [*crosses to her, taking it off*]. You're capable of tearing it off my back if I don't.

TEDDIE [*putting the cloak on* ELIZABETH]. And we'll buy you a tooth-brush in London in the morning.

LADY KITTY. She must write a note for Arnold. I'll put it on her pin-cushion.

TEDDIE. Pin-cushion be blowed! Come, darling, we'll drive through the dawn and through the sunrise.

ELIZABETH [*kissing* LADY KITTY]. Good-bye, good-bye.

[PORTEOUS *kisses her hand*

[TEDDIE *puts his arm round her and they go out into the night*

PORTEOUS *goes to window and waves handkerchief.*

LADY KITTY. Oh, Hughie, how it all comes back to me. Will they suffer all we suffered? And have we suffered all in vain?

PORTEOUS [*takes her arm*]. My dear, I don't know that in life it matters so much what you do as what you are. No one can learn by the experience of another, because no circumstances are quite the same. [*He turns to her—takes her hands.*] If we made rather a hash of things perhaps it was because we were rather trivial people. [*She sits in settee.*] You can do anything in this world if you're prepared to take the consequences, and consequences depend on character.

[*Crosses to left of her, sits by her*

[*Enter* CHAMPION-CHENEY, *door up right, rubbing his hands*

*He is as pleased as Punch.*

CLIVE. Well, I think I've settled the hash of that young man.

[*Comes centre*

LADY KITTY. Oh!

CLIVE. You have to get up very early in the morning to get the better of your humble servant. [*There is the sound of a car starting*

LADY KITTY. What is that?

CLIVE. It sounds like a car. I expect it's your chauffeur taking one of the maids for a joy-ride.

PORTEOUS. Whose hash are you talking about?

CLIVE [*turns chair by settee and sits*]. Mr Edward Luton's, my dear Hughie. I told Arnold exactly what to do and he's done it. What makes a prison? Why, bars and bolts. Remove them and a prisoner won't want to escape. Clever, I flatter myself, clever!

PORTEOUS. You were always that, Clive, but at the moment you're obscure.

CLIVE. I told Arnold to go to Elizabeth, and sacrifice himself all along the line.

LADY KITTY. Arnold did that?

CLIVE. He followed my instructions to the letter. I've just seen him. She's shaken. I'm willing to bet five hundred pounds to a penny that she won't bolt. [*They exchange looks and begin to chuckle.*] A downy old bird, eh? Downy's the word. Downy.

[*He begins to laugh. They laugh too. Presently they all three are in fits of laughter.*

# A BILL OF DIVORCEMENT

## By CLEMENCE DANE

*First produced at the St Martin's Theatre, London, March 14, 1921*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

| | |
|---|---|
| Margaret Fairfield | Bassett |
| Sydney Fairfield | Kit Pumphrey |
| Gray Meredith | Dr Alliot |
| Hilary Fairfield | The Rev. Christopher Pumphrey |
| Miss Hester Fairfield | |

Scene: *A small house in the country. The action passes on Christmas Day* 1933. *The audience is asked to imagine that the recommendations of the "Majority Report of the Royal Commission on Divorce v. Matrimonial Causes" have become the law of the land.*

Act I. *The hall. Morning.*
Act II. *The drawing-room. Early afternoon.*
Act III. *The hall. Late afternoon.*

THE names of Mrs Aphra Behn and Mrs Centlivre are remembered, but women playwrights of distinction are rare in the annals of drama. There is no Jane Austen of the theatre, there are no Brontës and no Eliot. It is odd to note, also, that in our day, when many women have successfully written plays, they seem, as a rule, 'single-speech Hamiltons,' and to be lacking in staying power. The man who is audacious enough to speculate upon feminine psychology may conclude that, although a right idea may carry a woman playwright through one play, women are, as a sex, temperamentally deficient in that scarcely definable quality, the 'sense of the theatre.'

Miss Clemence Dane is a notable, an almost unique, exception. She has staying-power, she has a remarkably fine 'sense of the theatre,' and she declines to allow the use of her gift to degenerate into virtuosity. Her later plays, *Naboth's Vineyard*, *Granite*, and *Mariners*, have an austerity of content combined with an ease of contrivance which makes

them workmanlike art. In *Will Shakespeare* she very nearly brought off a tremendous feat: she almost wrote a play worthy of its ambitious subject, and her Queen Elizabeth, at any rate, belongs to a masterpiece. But it is upon *A Bill of Divorcement*, a play so theatrically right, so little theatrical, that her fame as a playwright chiefly rests.

Miss Clemence Dane's success is the more remarkable because of two exceptional circumstances: she is a woman playwright who persists (a rare phenomenon), and she is a great tragic writer. She was an actress before she turned to writing, and she wrote novels before she wrote plays. The author of *Legend* and *Regiment of Women* was no stranger to fame when *A Bill of Divorcement* enlarged her reputation.

# ACT I

*The curtain rises on the hall, obviously used as the common-room of a country house. On the right (of the audience) is the outer door and a staircase that runs down from an upper landing towards the middle of the room, half hiding what has once been a separate smaller room with a baize door at the back. In the corner a French window opens on to a snowbound garden. On the left, facing the entrance, a log-fire is blazing. Staircase, pictures, grandfather clock, etc., are wreathed with holly and mistletoe. At the breakfast-table, which is laid for three and littered with paper and string, sit* Miss Hester Fairfield *and* Margaret Fairfield, *her niece by marriage. The third chair has two or three parcels piled up on it.*

Hester Fairfield *is one of those twitching, highminded, elderly ladies in black who keep a grievance as they might keep a pet dog—as soon as it dies they replace it by another. The grievance of the moment seems to be the empty third chair, and* Margaret Fairfield *is, as usual, on the defensive. Such a little, pretty, helpless-looking woman as* Margaret *has generally half a dozen big sons and a husband to bully; but* Margaret *has only a daughter, and her way of looking at even the chair on which that daughter ought to be sitting is the way of a child whose doll has suddenly come to life. For the rest, she is so youthfully anxious and simple and charming that the streak of grey in her hair puzzles you. You wonder what trouble has fingered it. It does not occur to you that she is quite thirty-five.*

Margaret [*apologizing*]. Yes, she is late.

Miss Fairfield. As usual!

Margaret. Oh, well, she was dancing till three. I hadn't the heart to wake her.

Miss Fairfield. Till three, was she? Who brought her home?

Margaret. Kit, of course.

Miss Fairfield. Three o'clock on Christmas morning! I wonder what the Rector said to that.

Margaret. Oh, Kit's on holiday.

Miss Fairfield. I heard you tell her myself to be in by twelve. If anything could make me approve of this marriage of yours——

Margaret. Oh, don't begin it again, Auntie!

The acting rights of this play are reserved. Applications regarding amateur performances should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

MISS FAIRFIELD. —it's that the child will have a strong hand over her at last. A stepfather's better than nothing—if you can call him a stepfather, when her father's still alive.

MARGARET. Oh, don't!

MISS FAIRFIELD. What's the use of saying "don't"? He *is* alive. You can't get away from that.

MARGARET. Aunt Hester—*please!*

MISS FAIRFIELD. Well, I'm only telling you—if it's got to be, I'm not sorry it's Gray Meredith.

MARGARET [*smiling*]. Yes, Sydney knows just how far she may go with Gray.

MISS FAIRFIELD. I see nothing to laugh at in that.

MARGARET. It's so funny to think how circumspect you all are with him. He's the one person I've always felt perfectly safe with. I'd ask anything of Gray.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*grimly*]. You always have, my dear!

MARGARET. I don't know why you should be unkind to me on Christmas morning.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*with a sort of grudging affection*]. I suppose it's because I've only got another week to be unkind to you in.

MARGARET [*restlessly*]. Oh, I wish you didn't hate it so.

MISS FAIRFIELD. My dear, when you see a person you care for, and she your own nephew's wife, on the brink of deadly sin——

MARGARET. Must we begin it again?

MISS FAIRFIELD. I do my duty. If you'd done yours your daughter wouldn't be late for breakfast, and I shouldn't be given the opportunity.

MARGARET. Perhaps I *had* better call her.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Everything getting cold—and so disrespectful! She ought to be taught.

MARGARET [*rising with a sigh*]. You're quite right. [*Calling at the foot of the stairs*] Sydney darling, shall I bring you up your coffee?

SYDNEY'S VOICE [*answering*]. It's all right, Mother! I'm coming.

MISS FAIRFIELD. And I suppose that's all you'll say.

[SYDNEY *comes out of her room. She is physically a bigger, fairer edition of* MARGARET, *but there the likeness ends. Her manner is brisk and decided. She is very sure of herself, but when she loses her temper, as she often does, she loses her aplomb and reveals the schoolgirl. Her attitude to the world is that of justice, untempered, except where her mother is in question, by mercy. But she is very fond of her mother.*

SYDNEY [*running down the stairs*]. Merry Christmas, every one! I'm not late, am I? Morning, Auntie! What, no post?

MARGARET. It gets later every year.

MISS FAIRFIELD. I'm very much obliged to you, Sydney, for the—card-case.

SYDNEY [*undoing her parcels*]. It's a cigarette-case, Auntie dear. You see, I thought if you gave me a Prayer Book again we might do a deal. Ah, I thought so! Thanks most awfully. It's sweet of you. Shall we?

MISS FAIRFIELD. What?

SYDNEY. Swop.

MARGARET. Sydney dear, that's rather rude.

SYDNEY [*swiftly*]. Well, Mother, I hate being hinted at.

MARGARET [*bewildered*]. Hint? What hint?

SYDNEY. Oh, Mother, you're such a lamb. You never see anything. [*To* MISS FAIRFIELD] I'm sorry, Auntie, but I'm seventeen, and I've left school, and I'm not going to church to-day, or any day any more ever, except to chaperon Mother and Gray next week, bless 'em!

MISS FAIRFIELD. I do think, Margaret, she ought at least to call him uncle.

MARGARET. Aren't you coming with us to-day, darling? Christmas Day?

SYDNEY. Sorry, Mother. It's against my principles. I refuse to kneel down and say I'm a miserable sinner. I'm not miserable and I'm not a sinner, and I cannot tell a lie to please any old—Prayer Book. Besides, I'm expecting Kit.

MISS FAIRFIELD. You'll find that Kit takes his mother to church. *She* hasn't lost all her influence——

SYDNEY [*darkly*]. She'll be finding herself up against me soon.

MARGARET [*like a schoolgirl*]. Oh, Sydney, has he——?

SYDNEY. He's trying his hardest to, but I like to sort of *spread* my jam.

MARGARET. Then—then——?

SYDNEY. I'm not actually engaged, if you mean that—[*watching their faces mischievously*] but I'm going to be.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Engaged at seventeen! Preposterous!

SYDNEY [*instantly*]. Mother was married at seventeen.

MARGARET. That was the War.

SYDNEY. I don't see what that's got to do with it.

MARGARET [*timidly*]. Sydney—at seventeen, one doesn't know enough——

SYDNEY. One doesn't know the same things, I dare say.

MARGARET. One doesn't know anything at all.

SYDNEY. Yes, but think of the hopeless sort of world you were seventeen in—even you. As for poor Auntie, as far as knowing things goes——

MARGARET. Sydney, my dear, be good!

SYDNEY. I am being good. I'm returning hint for hint.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*ruffling*]. Is this the way you let your daughter speak to me, Margaret?

SYDNEY [*closing with her*]. You see, she doesn't enjoy being hinted at either.

MARGARET [*between the upper and the nether millstone*]. I don't know what you mean, Sydney, but *don't*!

SYDNEY. I mean that I'm not going to let Aunt Hester interfere in my affairs like she does in yours. That's what I mean.

MISS FAIRFIELD. These are the manners they teach you at your fine school, I suppose!

SYDNEY. Never mind, Auntie, I've had my lessons in the holidays too. You needn't think I haven't watched the life you've led Mother over this divorce business.

MARGARET [*distressed at the discussion*]. Sydney! Sydney!

SYDNEY [*remorselessly*]. Well, hasn't she? What prevented you from marrying Gray ages ago? Father's been out of his mind long enough, poor man! You knew you were free to be free. You knew you were making Gray miserable and yourself miserable—and yet, though that divorce law has been in force for years, it's taken you all this time to fight your scruples. At least, you call them scruples! What you really mean is Aunt Hester and her Prayer Book. And now, when you have at last consented to give yourself a chance of being happy—when it's Christmas Day and you're going to be married at New Year—still you let Aunt Hester sit at your own breakfast-table and insult you with talk about deadly sin. It's no use pretending you didn't, Auntie, because Mother left my door open and I heard you.

MARGARET [*with a certain dignity*]. Sydney, I can take care of myself.

SYDNEY [*oblivious of it*]. Take care of yourself! As if everybody didn't ride roughshod over you when I'm not there.

MARGARET. Yes, but, my pet, you mustn't break out like this. Of course your aunt knows you don't really mean to be rude——

SYDNEY. I do mean to be rude to her when she's rude to you.

MARGARET. My dear, you quite misunderstand your aunt.

SYDNEY. Oh, no, I don't, Mother!

[MARGARET *shrugs her shoulders helplessly and sits down on the sofa to the left of the fireplace.*

MISS FAIRFIELD [*rising*]. I'm afraid you'll have to go to church without me, Margaret. I'm thoroughly upset. You've brought up your daughter to ignore me, and I know why. I'm the wrong side of the family. I'm the one person in this house who remembers poor Hilary. I shall read the service in the drawing-room. [*She goes out.*

SYDNEY [*looking after her*]. She owes me something. She's been

dying for an excuse, with that cold. [*She turns to the sofa and says more gently*] What's the use of crying, Mother? If Gray finds out there'll be a row, and then Aunt Hester'll be sorry she ever was born.

MARGARET. It isn't that. You get so excited, Sydney! You remind me—your father was so excitable. I don't like to see it.

SYDNEY. I'm not really. I needn't let myself go if I don't want to.

MARGARET. You mustn't get impatient with your aunt. She can't get accustomed to the new ways, that's all. I—I can't myself, sometimes. [*Restlessly*] I hope I'm doing right.

SYDNEY. Oh, I do think it's morbid to have a conscience. If Father had been dead fifteen years, would you say, "I hope I'm doing right"? And he *is* dead. His mind's dead. You know you've done all you can. And you're frightfully in love with Gray——

MARGARET [*flushing*]. Don't, Sydney!

SYDNEY. Well, you are, and so he is with you. So what's the worry about? Aunt Hester! What people like Aunt Hester choose to think! I call it morbid.

MARGARET [*whimsically*]. I suppose I haven't brought you up properly. Your aunt's quite right!

SYDNEY. Yes. That's what it always comes back to. "Your aunt's quite right!" I can argue with you by the hour——

MARGARET [*hastily*]. Oh, not this morning, darling, will you?

SYDNEY. —and Gray can argue with you by the hour——

MARGARET [*smiling*]. Ah, but he never does.

SYDNEY. —and you pretend to agree with us; but underneath your common sense, your mind's really thinking—"Your aunt's quite right!"

MARGARET. She stands for the old ways, Sydney.

SYDNEY. She stands for Noah and the Flood. She'd no business to go dragging up Father and the divorce on Christmas morning to upset you.

MARGARET. It wasn't your aunt.

SYDNEY. Then it was me, I suppose! "If I could only control my tongue and my temper," and all the rest of it!

MARGARET [*quietly*]. No, it was about Kit.

SYDNEY. Kit? Oh, that's all right, Mother. Don't you worry about me and Kit.

MARGARET. I do.

SYDNEY. You needn't.

MARGARET [*shyly*]. You see, I thought I was in love at seventeen, too.

SYDNEY. Oh, but I quite know what I'm doing.

MARGARET. And now I know I didn't know much about it. I don't want you to be—rushed.

SYDNEY. Nobody could make me do what I didn't want to do.

MARGARET [*forgetting* SYDNEY]. It was nobody's fault. It was the War—— [*She sits, dreaming.*

SYDNEY. It's extraordinary to me—whenever you middle-aged people want to excuse yourselves for anything you've done that you know you oughtn't to have done, you say it was the War. How could war make you get married if you didn't want to?

MARGARET [*groping for words*]. It was the feel in the air. They say the smell of blood sends horses crazy. That was the feel. One did mad things. Hilary—your father—he was going out—the trenches—to be hurt. And he was so fond of me he frightened me. I was so sorry. I thought I cared. Can't you understand?

SYDNEY. No. Either you care or you don't.

MARGARET [*passionately*]. How can you know until it happens to you? How was I to know there was more to it than keeping house and looking after Hilary—and you? How was I to know?

SYDNEY [*doubtfully*]. Is there so much more to it?

MARGARET. Yes.

SYDNEY. I don't believe there is for some people. Why it's just what I want—to look after Kit and a house of my own, and—oh, at least half a dozen kids.

MARGARET [*uncomfortably*]. Sydney *dear*!

SYDNEY. Oh, Kit's as keen as I am on eugenics. He's doing a paper for his debating society.

MARGARET. Well, I found you quite enough to manage.

SYDNEY [*leaning over the back of the sofa*]. I believe you were scared of me when I was little—[MARGARET *nods*] and even now——

MARGARET [*quickly*]. What?

SYDNEY [*quite good-humoured about it*]. Well, if you had to choose between me and Gray, it wouldn't be Gray who'd lose you.

MARGARET [*confronted with the idea*]. I hope I'd do what's right.

SYDNEY [*airily*]. There you are!

MARGARET [*as it goes home*]. It's not true. You've no right to make me out a heartless mother. But——

SYDNEY [*her arm round her mother's neck*]. Well—heartless Mother?

MARGARET [*clutching at the arm*]. Oh, Sydney—what should I do if Gray—if Gray——

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother! [*There is the sound of a motor driving up.*] There is Gray.

MARGARET [*jumping up hurriedly*]. Oh, and I'm not dressed. Say I'll be down in a minute. [*She runs upstairs.*

SYDNEY. You've plenty of time. The bells haven't begun yet.

MARGARET [*from the gallery*]. Tell Bassett to clear away.

[SYDNEY *rings the bell. The elderly maid enters through the baize door.*

BASSETT. Yes, miss?

SYDNEY. You can clear, Bassett!

[*While she is speaking* GRAY MEREDITH *comes in through the hall door. He is about forty, tall, dark, and quiet, very sure of himself, and quite indifferent to the effect he makes on other people. As he is a man who never has room in his head for more than one idea at a time, and as for the last five years that idea has been* MARGARET, *the rest of the world doesn't get much out of him. But mention her and he behaves exactly like a fire being poked.*

GRAY [*putting down a box he carries*]. Where's your mother?

SYDNEY [*folding her hands*]. Good morning, dear Sydney! A merry Christmas to you, and so many thanks for the tie that, with the help of your devoted aunt, you so thoughtfully——

GRAY. Stop it, there's a good child! I haven't missed her, have I?

SYDNEY. Pray accept in return as a small token of esteem and total dependency——

GRAY. I asked you if your mother had started.

SYDNEY [*in her natural voice*]. It's true, you know. You simply daren't cope with me yet.

GRAY [*twinkling in spite of himself*]. H'm! A time will come——

SYDNEY. Wouldn't it warm the cockles of Aunt Hester's heart to hear you! What are cockles, Gray? Gray, she says I ought to call you uncle! Gray, d'you think you have brought me what I think you have for a Christmas present?

GRAY. You'd better go and look. It's in the motor with Kit.

SYDNEY. It?

GRAY. He.

SYDNEY. By Viscount out of Vixen?

GRAY. Really, Sydney!

SYDNEY. Dear Uncle Hester!

GRAY. Yes, but Sydney——?

SYDNEY [*at the door*]. Oh, didn't I tell you? Mother says she'll be down in a minute.

[*She lets in the sound of the church bells as she goes out.*

[GRAY *walks about the room, then, going to the foot of the staircase, he calls softly.*

GRAY. Margaret! [*He waits a moment: then he calls again.*] Margaret!

[*He listens, takes another turn about the room, then, coming back to the staircase, stands, leaning against the foot of the balusters.* MARGARET *comes softly down the stairs, and bending over, puts her hands on his shoulders.*

MARGARET. A merry Christmas!

GRAY [*turning round and kissing her*]. And a happy New Year!

MARGARET. It will be—oh, it will be!

GRAY. I almost think it will sometimes. [*Holding her at arms length*] New frock?

MARGARET. Like it?

GRAY. Oh, I've seen it already.

MARGARET. Why, it's the first time I've put it on.

GRAY [*untying the box on the table as he speaks*]. Sydney carted it along with her last week when we went to choose—this.

MARGARET [*like a child with a new toy*]. For me, Gray?

GRAY. Looks like it.

MARGARET. Oh, I hope you haven't been extravagant.

GRAY [*opening the lid*]. Well, Sydney said——

MARGARET. Silver Fox! Oh, my dear, you shouldn't.

GRAY. Put 'em on. Sydney's quite a wise child.

MARGARET [*luxuriously*]. Oh, I do love being spoiled.

GRAY. You haven't had so much of it, have you, Meg?

MARGARET [*with a complete change of manner*]. Don't!

GRAY. What?

MARGARET. Don't call me Meg.

GRAY. Why not?

MARGARET. You never have before.

GRAY. Don't you see, I want a name for you that no one else uses.

MARGARET [*close to him*]. Yes, yes, that no one else has ever used. Not Meg. Not Margaret. Make a name of your own for me—new—new.

GRAY. Well, you're getting one new name pretty soon, anyhow.

MARGARET. Yes. New year—new name—new life. [*In his arms*] Oh, Gray, is thirty-five very old?

GRAY. Not when you say it.

MARGARET. Oh, Gray, we've time for everything still?

GRAY. Time for everything. [*He laughs.*] Except church, my child! Do you really insist on going?

MARGARET. Aunt Hester will be horrified if I don't. Besides——

[*She comes back to the table and begins putting the papers together.*

GRAY. What?

MARGARET. I suppose you'll think me a fool——

GRAY. Shall I?

MARGARET. Oh, Gray, for the first time in my life I'm happy. I want to say——

GRAY. What does she want to say?

MARGARET. "Humble and hearty thanks——"

[SYDNEY *runs in with a puppy in her arms. She is followed by*

KIT. KIT *is a good-looking, fair-haired boy who may be twenty-two, but is nevertheless much younger than* SYDNEY, *whom he takes as seriously as he takes everything else in life. It is part of her charm for him that he finds it a little difficult to keep up with her.*

SYDNEY. Mother! Mother! Look what Gray's brought me!

MARGARET. Oh, Sydney, your aunt isn't fond of dogs. Merry Christmas, Kit!

KIT. Merry Christmas, Mrs Fairfield!

SYDNEY. Yes, but isn't he an angel? And Kit's given me a collar for him. [*She goes up to* GRAY.] You know, Gray, it's so sweet of you that in return I'll——

GRAY. Well?

SYDNEY [*conspiratorially*]. Make Kit late for church if you like.

GRAY [*putting himself in her hands*]. I did promise him a lift.

SYDNEY [*settling it*]. He can cut across the fields. [*Aloud*] Kit, what about a bone for the angel? You might go and make love to Bassett.

[*She puts the dog into his arms. They stroll off together into the inner room.*

KIT [*earnestly, as he goes out through the baize door*]. He ought to be kept to biscuits.

SYDNEY [*calling to him*]. Just one to gnaw. [*Then over her shoulder*] Mother, the bells have been going quite a while.

MARGARET [*to* GRAY]. Listen, don't you love them?

GRAY. Church-bells?

MARGARET. Wedding-bells.

GRAY. Margaret, you've stepped straight out of a Trollope novel.

MARGARET [*flushing*]. I suppose you think I'm sentimental.

GRAY. No, but you're pure nineteenth century.

MARGARET. I'm not. [*Telephone-bell rings.*] Oh!

GRAY. There goes the twentieth. Don't you see how it makes you jump? [SYDNEY *has gone to the telephone.*

SYDNEY. Hullo! Hullo! . . . You rang *me* up. [*She hangs up the receiver.*] "Sorry you have been troubled!" And it's sure to be some one trying to get on.

GRAY. On Christmas morning? Hardly! I say, come along! The bells have stopped.

MARGARET [*in a strange voice*]. Yes, they stopped when that other bell rang.

SYDNEY. Why, Mother, what's the matter?

MARGARET [*blindly*]. They stopped.

SYDNEY. I told you, darling, you're late.

MARGARET. Give me my furs. I'm cold.

[GRAY *helps her on with them.*

SYDNEY [*proud of her*]. They *are* lovely.

MARGARET [*at the door, wistfully*]. It isn't too good to be true, is it?

GRAY. The furs?

MARGARET. Everything! You—oh, what a fool I am!

[*You hear* GRAY's *laugh answering hers as they go out together, and the sound of the motor driving away.*

SYDNEY [*subsiding on the sofa, to* KIT, *who has come in as the others go*]. I thought they'd never get off. Mother has a way of standing around and gently fussing—I tell you I'll be glad when next week's over.

KIT. So'll I. I haven't had a look in lately.

SYDNEY [*with an intimate glance*]. Not last night? But it *has* been a job, running Mother. I'm bridesmaid and best man and family lawyer and Juliet's nurse all rolled into one—and a sort of lightning-conductor for Aunt Hester into the bargain. That's why I've had so little time for you. It's quite true what Gray was saying just now—Mother *is* nineteenth century. She's sweet and helpless, but she's obstinate too. My word, the time she took making up her mind to get that divorce!

KIT. It's just about that that I've been wanting to talk to you. You see——

SYDNEY. Well?

KIT. You see——

SYDNEY. Hurry up, old thing!

KIT. Well, you see, when I got home last night the Governor was sitting up for me.

SYDNEY. He would be.

KIT. And in the course of the row—*you* came in to it.

SYDNEY. Oh, but he likes me.

KIT. Yes, he was quite soothed when I said we were engaged.

SYDNEY. Liar!

KIT [*serenely*]. Oh, well——

SYDNEY [*she finds his chuckle infectious*]. What did he say?

KIT. Oh, lots of rot, of course, about being too young. But he was quite bucked really until——

SYDNEY. Well?

KIT. Well, I was a fool. I said something, quite by chance, about your father. Then the fur began to fly. You see, it seems he thought your mother was a widow——

SYDNEY [*ruffling up*]. What's it got to do with him?

KIT. Well, you see——

SYDNEY. If you'd only make me see instead of you-seeing me all the time.

KIT. I'm afraid of hurting your feelings.

SYDNEY. I'm not nineteenth century.

KIT [*desperately*]. Well, my people are.

SYDNEY. Well?

KIT. That's the trouble—my people are! Father promptly began about not seeing his way to——

SYDNEY. To what, Kit?

KIT. To—to marrying them.

SYDNEY. But I've never heard of anything so crazy.

KIT. Of course, you know, there's nothing to worry about. There are heaps of clergymen who will.

SYDNEY. My dear boy, if Mother isn't married in her own parish church she'll think she's living in sin.

KIT. Well, there it is!

SYDNEY. But look here, the old Rector knew all about it. Do you mean to say that a new man can come into our parish and insult Mother just because his beastly conscience doesn't work the same way the old Rector's did? The divorce is perfectly legal.

KIT [*in great discomfort*]. Yes, Father knows all that. [*Hopefully*] Of course, I don't see myself why a registry office——

SYDNEY. If it were me I'd prefer it. Much less fuss. But Mother wouldn't.

KIT. But she ought to see——

SYDNEY. But she won't. It's no use reckoning on what people ought to be. You've got to deal with them as they are.

KIT [*guiltily*]. Well, I'm awfully sorry.

SYDNEY. It's no use being sorry. We've got to do something.

KIT [*hopelessly*]. When once the old man gets an idea into his head——

SYDNEY. He'd better not let it out in front of Mother. Gray'd self kill him if he did. And I tell you this, Kit, what Gray leaves will account for, even if he is your father. Poor little Mother!

KIT. Well I'm all on your side, you know that. But of course, Sydney, a clergyman needn't remarry divorced people. It's in that bill. The Governor was quoting it to-day.

SYDNEY. But doesn't he know the circumstances?

KIT. He only knows what I do.

SYDNEY. One doesn't shout things at people, naturally. But it's nothing to be ashamed of. It's only that my unfortunate father has been in an asylum ever since I can remember. Shell-shock. It began before I was born. He never came home again. Mother had to give up going to see him even. It seemed to make him worse.

KIT. Pretty tragic.

SYDNEY. Oh, for years now he hasn't known anyone, luckily. And he's well looked after. He's quite all right.

KIT [*uncomfortably*]. You're a queer girl.

SYDNEY. But he is.

KIT. Yes—but——

SYDNEY. What?

KIT. Your own father——

SYDNEY [*impatiently*]. My dear boy, I've never even seen him. Oh, of course it's very sad, but I can't go about with my handkerchief to my eyes all the time, can I?

KIT. Yes—but——

SYDNEY. I hate cant.

KIT [*leaning over the back of the sofa, his hands playing with her chain*]. You little brute—you're as hard as nails, aren't you?

SYDNEY [*putting up her face to him*]. Am I? [*They kiss.*

MISS FAIRFIELD [*passing through*]. Really, Sydney! Before lunch!

KIT. You know, old thing, sometimes I don't feel as if I should ever really get on with your aunt.

SYDNEY [*dimpling*]. You'll have to if——

KIT. Good Lord! You don't want her in the house!

SYDNEY [*calmly*]. I must take her off Mother sometimes. That's only fair. But she shan't worry you.

KIT. I say, you're going to have things your own way, aren't you?

SYDNEY. But of course I am, darling.

KIT [*heavily*]. But look here—marriage is a sort of mutual show, isn't it? We've got to pull together.

SYDNEY. Of course.

KIT. But suppose we come to a crossroads, so to speak?

SYDNEY. Well, somebody'll have to give way, won't they, darling?

KIT. H'm!

SYDNEY. My dear boy, if you want a doormat you'd better look out for some one—some one like poor dear Mother, for instance.

KIT [*wiser than he knows*]. But you *are* like her, Sydney!

SYDNEY. Me? Do you think I'd let my daughter run me the way I run Mother? Not much!

MISS FAIRFIELD [*re-entering*]. I think I left my—— [*Murmurs.*

SYDNEY [*aside*]. It's no good. She's doing this on purpose because I cheeked her. You'd better go, old man. Besides, they must be well through the anthem.

KIT [*disturbed*]. Good Lord! I should think I had better go!

SYDNEY [*going with him to the door*]. I say, keep your father quiet till I've had time to talk to Gray.

KIT. Right! [*He goes out.*

SYDNEY [*calling*]. Kit!

KIT [*reappearing*]. Yes?

SYDNEY. Come round in the afternoon.

KIT. Right! [*He goes out*

SYDNEY [*calling*]. Kit!

KIT [*reappearing*]. Yes?

SYDNEY. I don't suppose there'll ever be any crossroads.

KIT. Darling! [*A scuffle.* SYDNEY *reappears patting her hair.*

MISS FAIRFIELD. I'm afraid I disturbed a *tête-à-tête*.

SYDNEY [*sweetly*]. Oh, Auntie, whatever made you think that?

MISS FAIRFIELD. But I really couldn't sit in the drawing-room. There's no fire. [*She sits down and opens her book.*

SYDNEY [*in a soft little voice, hums*]. "When we are married we'll have sausages for tea."

MISS FAIRFIELD. Do you mind being quiet while I read the service?

SYDNEY. Sorry! [*She takes up some knitting.*

MISS FAIRFIELD. What are you doing?

SYDNEY. Tie for Kit.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Sydney! Needlework on Sunday!

SYDNEY. Well, I can't sit in the drawing-room either if there's no fire.

MISS FAIRFIELD. There's no need to lose your temper.

SYDNEY [*out of patience*]. Here, I'm going.

[*As she makes for the staircase the telephone gives a broken tinkle.*

MISS FAIRFIELD. Sydney, I believe that telephone's going off!

SYDNEY. Yes, I'm sure it's some one trying to get on. They've rung up once already.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Sydney, I won't be left to deal with it. [*The telephone rings deafeningly.*] There, I told you so.

SYDNEY. Well, it's not my fault! [*She takes off the receiver.*] Hullo! Hullo! . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . [*To her aunt*] It's a trunk-call.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Who on earth——?

SYDNEY. Yes . . . Hullo! . . . Yes . . . Mrs Fairfield's out. Shall I take a message? . . . This is Miss Fairfield speaking . . . All right, I'll hold on . . . [*To her aunt*] Auntie, it's from Bedford. It's about Father. [*Into the telephone*] Yes . . . This is Miss Fairfield speaking . . . What? . . . Good Lord!

MISS FAIRFIELD. Sydney, don't say "Good Lord!"

SYDNEY. But you should have let Mrs Fairfield know! . . . Only this morning? Oh, I see . . . No, we've heard nothing. When did you find out? . . . What makes you——? I see . . . No, he's not here . . . Of course we'd let you know . . . Then you'll let us know at once if anything . . . yes . . . *Miss* Fairfield. Mrs Fairfield is going away very soon . . . Thank you . . . Good-bye.

[SYDNEY *hangs up the receiver and turns round.*

MISS FAIRFIELD. Well?

SYDNEY. Father's got away.

MISS FAIRFIELD. What? Who spoke to you?

SYDNEY. The head man—what's his name? Rogers! Frightfully upset.

MISS FAIRFIELD. I should think so. Why, the poor fellow's dangerous!

SYDNEY. Apparently he's been very much better lately, and this week a marked change, he says.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*agitated*]. You mean he's getting well?

SYDNEY. Looks like it. Rogers was awfully guarded, but—apparently they'd already written to Uncle Hugh and the solicitors.

MISS FAIRFIELD. They ought to have written to me.

SYDNEY. Of course, they wouldn't write to Mother—now—but we ought to have heard.

MISS FAIRFIELD. When did they miss him?

SYDNEY. This morning. Then a lot about its being inexplicable and the precautions they had taken and so on. The fact remains that he has managed to get away.

MISS FAIRFIELD. It's disgraceful carelessness.

SYDNEY. Their theory is that he has suddenly come to himself. Is it possible, Auntie? Can it happen?

MISS FAIRFIELD. It's quite possible. It does. It was the same with my poor sister, Grace. After ten years that was.

SYDNEY. But the doctors said incurable.

MISS FAIRFIELD. The Almighty's greater than the doctors. And nerves—nerves are queer things. I nursed your Aunt Grace. Well, I always told your mother to wait.

SYDNEY [*struck*]. Is that a fact about Aunt Grace? Was she out of her mind too?

MISS FAIRFIELD. She never had to be sent away.

SYDNEY. Nobody ever told me.

MISS FAIRFIELD. There's something in most families.

SYDNEY. But with Father—wasn't it shell-shock?

MISS FAIRFIELD. It was brought on by shell-shock.

SYDNEY. D'you mean that in our family there's insanity?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*fidgeting*]. That's not the way to talk. But we're nervy, all of us, we're nervy. Your poor father would have been no worse than the rest if it hadn't been for the War.

SYDNEY [*slowly*]. What do you mean, "nervy"?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*with a sidelong glance*]. I mean the way you're taking this.

SYDNEY [*sharply*]. How am I taking it?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*irritated*]. Well, look at you now.

SYDNEY [*coldly*]. I'm perfectly under control.

MISS FAIRFIELD. That's it. It's not natural.

SYDNEY [*slowly*]. You mean, I shouldn't bother to control myself

MISS FAIRFIELD [*hastily*]. You're too young to think about such ings.

SYDNEY. —if I weren't afraid, you mean. Did Mother know— hen she married?

MISS FAIRFIELD. I tell you there are troubles in every family, but ne doesn't talk about them.

SYDNEY. But did she *know* the trouble was insanity?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*shortly*]. I don't know.

SYDNEY. Did Father?

MISS FAIRFIELD. One always knows in a general sort of way.

SYDNEY [*relentlessly*]. Am I nervy?

MISS FAIRFIELD. Young people don't have nerves.

SYDNEY. Insanity! A thing you can hand on! And I told Kit it as shell-shock!

MISS FAIRFIELD. I don't see what difference it makes to Christopher.

SYDNEY. You don't see what difference——? You don't see——? *o herself*] But *I* see. [*There is a pause.*] Aunt Hester, suppose ather really gets well——?

MISS FAIRFIELD. Well?

SYDNEY. Whatever will he do?

MISS FAIRFIELD. It's a question of what your mother will do.

SYDNEY. But it won't have anything to do with Mother.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*grimly*]. Won't it?

SYDNEY. What on earth are you driving at?

MISS FAIRFIELD. I can't discuss it with you.

SYDNEY. Why not?

MISS FAIRFIELD. You're too young.

SYDNEY. I'm old enough to be engaged.

MISS FAIRFIELD. You're not engaged.

SYDNEY [*insolently*]. Kissed, then. You saw that half an hour ago, dn't you? I might just as well say I can't discuss it with you because u're too old.

MISS FAIRFIELD. How dare you speak to me like that?

SYDNEY [*beside herself*]. Oh, are all old people such stone walls? re's a shadow, here's a trouble, here's a ghost in the house—and en I ask you what shall I do you talk about your blessed dignity!

MISS FAIRFIELD [*rising*]. This is the second time in one morning t you have driven me out of the room.

SYDNEY [*wringing her hands*]. Well, I'm sorry! But I'm so worried. n't you see I've got to keep it off Mother? and Kit! Oh, I've got tell Kit! [*Following her irresolutely*] Auntie, if you'd only be decent

[*but* MISS FAIRFIELD *has gone out.* SYDNEY *turns back into the room.*] If I only knew what to do!

[*She stands hesitating. Then she goes to the telephone: makes a movement as if to take it down, but checks herself, shaking her head. She comes back to the sofa at last and flings herself down on it, fidgeting with the cushions and frowning. She is roused by the click of a latch as the French window in the inner room is softly opened, and* HILARY FAIRFIELD *steps over the threshold. He is a big, fresh-coloured man with grey hair and bowed shoulders. In speech and movements he is quick and jerky, inclined to be boisterous, but pathetically easy to check. This he knows himself, and he has, indeed, an air of being always in rebellion against his own habit of obedience. He comes in, treading softly, his bright eyes dancing with excitement, like a child getting ready to spring a surprise on somebody. Something in the fashion of the empty room (for he does not see* SYDNEY *crouching in the cushions) disconcerts him. He hesitates. The happy little smile fades. His eye wanders from one object to another and he moves about, recognizing a picture here, fingering there an unfamiliar hanging, as it were losing and finding himself a dozen times in his progress round the room. He comes to a stand at last before the fireplace, warming his hands. Then he takes out a pipe and with the other hand feels absently along the mantelpiece for the matches.* SYDNEY, *who has been watching him with a sort of breathless sympathy, says softly:*

SYDNEY. What are you looking for?

HILARY. They've moved my—[*with a start*] eh? [*He turns sharply and sees her.*] Meg! It's Meg! [*With a rush*] Oh, my own darling!

SYDNEY [*her confidence in her power to deal with the situation suddenly gone*]. I—I'm not Meg.

HILARY [*boisterously*]. Not Meg! Tell me I don't know Meg! [SYDNEY *gives a nervous schoolgirl giggle.*] Eh? [*Then, his voice changing completely*] No, it's not Meg. [*Uneasily*] I beg your pardon. I thought you were—another girl. I've been away a long time.

SYDNEY. Whom do you want?

HILARY [*startled again*]. There, you see, it's her voice too. Who are you?

SYDNEY [*fencing*]. How did you get in?

HILARY. Tool-shed gate. [*Louder*] Who are you?

SYDNEY. Where have you come from?

HILARY. Bedford. Took a car. [*Lashing himself into an agitation*] Who are you?

SYDNEY. Whom do you want to see?

HILARY [*losing all control*]. Who are you?

SYDNEY [*slowly*]. I think I'm your daughter.

[HILARY *stares at her blankly. Then he bursts out laughing.*

HILARY. Daughter! Daughter! By God, that's good! My wife isn't my wife, she's my daughter! And my daughter's seventeen and I'm twenty-two.

SYDNEY. You're forgetting what years and years——

HILARY. Yes, of course. It's years and years. It's a lifetime. It's my daughter's lifetime. What's your name—daughter?

SYDNEY. Sydney.

HILARY. Sydney. Sydney, eh? My mother was Sydney. I like Sydney. I—[*catching at his dignity*] I suppose we're rather a shock to each other—Sydney.

SYDNEY. No. You're not a shock to me. But I'm afraid——

HILARY [*breaking in*]. Is my——? Is your——? Where's Margaret?

SYDNEY. At church.

HILARY. Back soon, eh?

SYDNEY. Yes, that's why I'm afraid——

HILARY [*unheeding*]. I might go to meet her, eh?

SYDNEY [*quickly*]. Oh, I wouldn't. Come and sit down and wait for her and talk.

HILARY [*obediently*]. Very well. [*He sits down beside her on the sofa. They look at each other. He says shyly*] I say, isn't this queer?

SYDNEY. It makes me want to cry.

HILARY. Why? That's all over. Laugh! Laugh! That's the thing to do. What a lovely room this is! I can't say I like the new paper—or the curtains!

SYDNEY [*quickly*]. Yes, I liked the old red ones, too. [*Then, with an effort*] Those—aren't—the only changes. Everything changes——

HILARY [*swiftly*]. Bet you Aunt Hester hasn't, eh? [*They look at each other and laugh.*] And I bet you—— I say, is your mother such a darling still?

SYDNEY [*recalled to the business before her, brusquely*]. Look here—Father——

HILARY [*savouring it*]. "Father!" "Father!" Well?

SYDNEY. We've got to talk. We've got to get things straight before she comes back.

HILARY [*his eye and his attention beginning to wander*]. Back soon, eh? Why has Meg moved the clock? It was much better where we put it. Must get it put back. Nearly one. She's late, isn't she? I—I really think, you know, I'll go out and meet your mother.

SYDNEY [*authoritatively*]. You're to stay here.

HILARY [*beginning obediently*]. Very well—— [*He flares suddenly*] I'll do as I like about that.

SYDNEY [*passionately*]. I'll not have you frighten her.

HILARY. I? [*He smiles securely.*

SYDNEY. Can't you realize what the shock——?

HILARY [*blissfully*]. Never known anyone die of joy yet!

SYDNEY. Father, you don't understand! You and Mother——

HILARY [*getting irritated*]. Look here, this is nothing to do with you——

SYDNEY. But you mustn't——

HILARY [*violently*]. Now I tell you I'm not going to be hectored. I won't stand it. I've had enough of it. D'you hear? I've had enough of it.

SYDNEY. If you talk to my mother like this——

HILARY [*softening*]. Meg understands.

SYDNEY [*jealously*]. So do I understand.

HILARY. I believe you do. You got wild all in a moment. That's my way, too. It means nothing. Meg can't see that it means nothing. But it makes a man wild, you know, to be dragooned when he's as sane as—my God, I *am* sane! That's all over, isn't it? I am sane. Daughter!

SYDNEY [*watching him*]. Father?

HILARY. Don't let me get—that way. It's bad. Help me to go slow. I'm as well as you are, you know. But it's new. It only happened to-day—like a curtain lifting. [*Confidentially*] You see, I was standing in the garden——

SYDNEY. I can't conceive how you got away.

HILARY. Led. Like Peter out of prison. I went through the gate openly. Their eyes were blinded. [*With a complete change of tone*] Pure luck, you know. There were visitors going out—and I nipped along with them, talking. No one spotted me. I wouldn't have believed it possible. Heaps of us—of them, I mean—have tried, you know.

SYDNEY. But you'd no money.

HILARY [*whimsically*]. I took the first taxi I saw. Promised him double. He's at the lower gate now, waiting to be paid.

SYDNEY. Father *dear*! Ticking away the tuppences! We're not millionaires!

HILARY [*carelessly*]. Your mother'll see to it. [*Sound of a motor-horn.*] That's him! I suppose he's got tired of waiting and come round.

SYDNEY. No, no! That'll be Mother. You mustn't stop here. You must let me tell her. You must let me tell her first.

[*She goes out hurriedly.*

HILARY. Your mother, is it? Your mother, eh? Here—child—a minute, give me a minute! give me a minute!

MARGARET [*as she comes in*]. No—he couldn't. But he's coming round directly after lunch—Hilary!

HILARY [*like a man who can't see*]. Meg! Is it Meg? Meg, I've come home.

MARGARET [*terrified*]. Sydney, don't go away!

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother!

HILARY. Meg!

MARGARET. But they said—they said—incurable. They shouldn't have said—incurable.

HILARY. What does it matter? I'm well. I'm well, Meg! I tell you—it came over me like a lantern-flash—like a face turning to you. I was in the garden, you know—lost. I was a lost soul—outcast! No hope. I can never make anyone understand. I was never like the rest of them. I was sane, always—but—the face was turned away.

SYDNEY. What face?

HILARY. The face of God.

MARGARET. Sydney—is he——?

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother! That isn't madness. He's come to himself.

MARGARET. Then—then—what am I to do?

HILARY. What's that? [*He comes nearer.*

MARGARET. I—I——

HILARY [*staring at her*]. You don't say a word. One would think you weren't glad to see me. Aren't you glad to see me?

MARGARET. Of course—glad—you poor Hilary!

HILARY. If you knew what it is to say to myself—I'm at home! That place——!

MARGARET [*mechanically*]. Oh, but there was every comfort.

HILARY. Hell! Hell!

MARGARET [*insisting*]. But they were good to you?

HILARY. Good enough.

MARGARET [*in acute distress*]. They didn't—ill-treat——?

SYDNEY. Mother, you know you did the very best——

HILARY. If it had been heaven—what difference does it make? I was a dead man. Do you know what the dead do in heaven? They sit in their golden chairs and sicken for home. Why did you never come?

MARGARET. They wouldn't let me. It made you worse.

HILARY. Because I wanted you so.

MARGARET. But you didn't know me.

HILARY. My voice didn't—and my speech and my actions didn't. But *I* knew you. Meg—behind the curtain—behind the dreams and the noises, and the abandonment of God—I wanted you. I wanted you—I wanted—— [*He puts his hand to his head.*] Look here—I tell you we mustn't talk of these things. It's not safe, I tell you. When

I talk I see a black hand reaching up through the floor—do you see?—there—through the widening crack of the floor—to catch me by the ankle and drag—drag——

SYDNEY. Father—Father—go slow!

MARGARET [*terrified*]. Sydney!

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother! We'll manage.

HILARY [*turning to her*]. Yes, you tell your mother. I'm all right! You understand that, don't you? Once it was a real hand. Now I know it's in my mind. I tell you, Meg, I'm well. But it's not safe to think about anything but—— Oh, my dear, the holly and the crackle of the fire and the snow like a veil of peace on me—and you like the snow so still—— [*He comes to her with outstretched arms.*

MARGARET [*faintly*]. No—no—no——

HILARY [*exalted*]. Yes—yes—yes! [*He catches her to him.*

MARGARET. For pity's sake, Hilary——!

BASSETT [*entering*]. Lunch is served, ma'am!

MARGARET [*helplessly*]. Sydney?

SYDNEY. Lay an extra cover. This—my—this gentleman is staying to lunch.

HILARY [*boisterously*]. Staying to lunch! to lunch! That's a good joke, isn't it? I say, listen! I'm laughing. Do you know, I'm laughing? It's blessed to laugh. Staying to lunch! Yes, my girl! Lunch and tea and supper and breakfast, thank God! and for many a long day!

## ACT II

*The curtain rises on* MARGARET'S *drawing-room. It is prettily furnished in a gentle, white-walled, water-colour-in-gold-frame fashion, and is full of flowers. In one corner is a parrot in a cage, and near it* MISS FAIRFIELD'S *armchair and foot-stool and work-table. The fireplace has a white sheepskin in front of it, and brass fire-irons: on the mantelpiece is a gilt clock and many photographs. At right angles to the fire a low Empire couch runs out into the room. There is a hint of* SYDNEY *in the ultra-modern cushionry with which it is piled.*

*As the curtain goes up* BASSETT *is showing in* GRAY MEREDITH.

BASSETT. They're still at lunch, sir.

GRAY [*glancing at the clock*]. They're late.

BASSETT. It's the visitor, sir. He's kept them talking.

GRAY. Visitor?

BASSETT. Yes, sir, a strange gentleman. Will you take coffee, sir?

GRAY. I may as well go in and have it with them.

BASSETT. The mistress said, would you not, sir. She'd come to you.

GRAY [*a little surprised*]. Oh, very well.

BASSETT. I'll tell Miss Sydney you've come, sir.

GRAY [*lifting his eyebrows*]. Tell Mrs Fairfield.

BASSETT. Miss Sydney said I was to tell her too, sir, quietly.

GRAY [*puzzled*]. Is——? [*He checks an impulse to question the servant.*] All right!

BASSETT. Thank you, sir.

[*She goes out, leaving the door open. There is a slight pause.* MARGARET *comes in hurriedly, shutting the door behind her.*

GRAY [*smiling*]. Well, what's the mystery?

MARGARET. Gray, he's come back!

GRAY. Who?

MARGARET. Hilary!

GRAY [*lightly*]. Hilary? What Hilary? *Hilary!*

MARGARET. Yes.

GRAY. Good God!

MARGARET. He got away. He came straight here. I found him with Sydney.

GRAY. Don't be frightened. I'm here. Is he dangerous?

MARGARET. No, no, poor fellow!

GRAY. You can't be sure. Anyway, I'd better take charge of him while you 'phone the asylum. No, that won't do, there are no trains. We must ring up the authorities.

MARGARET. Oh, no, Gray!

GRAY. It's not pleasant, but it's the only thing to do.

MARGARET. You don't understand.

GRAY. There's only one way to deal with an escaped lunatic.

MARGARET. But he's not. He's well.

GRAY. What's that?

MARGARET. He's well. He knows me. He——

GRAY. I don't believe it.

MARGARET. Do you think I want to believe it? Oh, what a ghastly thing to say!

GRAY. This has nothing to do with you. He has nothing to do with you. Leave me to deal with him. [*He goes towards the door.*

MARGARET. Where are you going?

GRAY. 'Phoning for Doctor Alliot to begin with.

MARGARET. Sydney's done that already.

GRAY. Sydney's head's on her shoulders.

MARGARET. He'll be here as soon as he can. He could always manage Hilary.

GRAY. You'd better go up to your room.

MARGARET. No.

GRAY. Don't take it too hard. It'll be over in an hour. We'll get him away quietly, poor devil.

MARGARET. But it's no good, Gray, he's well. We've been on to the asylum already. They say we should have heard in a day or two even if he hadn't got away.

GRAY. Really well?

MARGARET. The old Hilary—voice and ways and—oh, my God! what am I to do?

GRAY. Do? You?

MARGARET. Don't you see, he knows nothing? His hair's grey and he talks as he talked at twenty. It's horrible.

GRAY. What do you mean, he knows nothing?

MARGARET. About the divorce. About you and me. He thinks it's all—as he left it.

GRAY [*incredulously*]. You've said nothing?

MARGARET. He's like a lost child come home. Do you think I want to send him crazy again? He——

GRAY [*with a certain anger*]. You've said nothing?

MARGARET. Not yet.

GRAY. You'll come away with me at once.

MARGARET. I can't. I've got to think of Hilary.

GRAY. You've got to think of me.

MARGARET. I *am* you. But I've done him so much injury——

GRAY. *You've* done Fairfield injury? You little saint!

MARGARET. Saint? I'm a wicked woman. I'm wishing he hadn't got well. I'm wishing the doctors will say it's not true. In my wicked heart I'm calling down desolation on my own husband.

GRAY. You have no husband. You're marrying me in a week. You're mine.

MARGARET. I'm afraid——

GRAY. Whose are you? Answer me.

MARGARET. Yours.

GRAY. You know it?

MARGARET. I know it.

GRAY. Then never be afraid again.

MARGARET. No, not when you're here. I'm not afraid when you're here. But I must be good to Hilary. You see that?

GRAY. What good is "good" to him, poor devil?

MARGARET. At least I'll break it gently.

GRAY. Gently? That's just like a woman. All you can do for him is to come away now.

MARGARET. How can I? He's got to be told.

GRAY. Then let me tell him.

MARGARET. No, no! From you, just from you, it would be wanton. I won't have cruelty.

GRAY. We'll go straight up to town and get married at once. That'll settle everything.

MARGARET. You mustn't rush me. I've got to do what's right.

GRAY. It is right. There's nothing else to be done. You can't stay here.

MARGARET. No, I can't stay here. Don't let me stay here.

GRAY. Come with me. The car's outside. You say Alliot will be here in ten minutes. Leave him a note. He's an old friend as well as a doctor. Let him deal with it if you won't let me.

MARGARET. Oh, can't you see that I must tell Hilary myself?

GRAY [*angrily*]. Women are incomprehensible!

MARGARET. It's men who are uncomprehending. Can't you feel that it'll hurt him less from me?

GRAY. It'll hurt him ten thousand times more.

MARGARET. But differently. It's the things one might have said that fester. At least I'll spare him that torment. He shall say all he wants to say.

GRAY [*blackly*]. I suppose the truth is that there's something in the very best of women that enjoys a scene.

MARGARET. That's the first bitter thing you've ever said to me.

GRAY [*breaking out*]. Can't you see what it does to me to know you are in the same house with him? For God's sake come out of it!

MARGARET [*close to him*]. I want to come, now, this moment. I want to be forced to come.

GRAY. That settles it.

MARGARET [*eluding him*]. But I mustn't! Don't you see that I mustn't? I can't leave Sydney to lay my past for me.

GRAY. Your past is dead.

MARGARET. Its ghost's awake and walking.

HILARY'S VOICE. Meg! Meg!

MARGARET [*clinging to him*]. Listen, it's calling to me.

HILARY'S VOICE. Meg, where are you?

MARGARET. It's too late! I'm too old! I shall never get away from him. I told you it was too good to be true.

GRAY [*deliberately matter-of-fact*]. Listen to me! I am going home now. There are orders to be given. I must get some money and papers. But I shall be back here in an hour. I give you just that hour to tell him what you choose. After that you'll be ready to come.

MARGARET. If—if I've managed——

GRAY. There's no 'if.' You're coming.

MARGARET. Am I coming, Gray?

HILARY [*entering from the hall*]. Meg, Sydney said you'd gone to your room. Hullo! What's this? Who's this? Doctor, eh? I've been expecting them down on me. [*To* GRAY] It's no good, you know. I'm as fit as you are. Any test you like.

MARGARET. Mr Meredith called to see me, Hilary! He's just going.

HILARY. Oh, sorry!

[*He walks to the fire and stands warming his hands, but watching them over his shoulder.*

GRAY [*at the door, in a low voice to* MARGARET]. I don't like leaving you.

MARGARET. You must! It's better! But—come back quickly!

GRAY. You'll be ready?

MARGARET. I will. [GRAY *goes out.*

HILARY [*uneasily*]. Who's that man?

MARGARET. His name's Gray Meredith.

HILARY. What's he doing here?

MARGARET. He's an old friend.

HILARY. I don't know him, do I?

MARGARET. It's since you were ill. It's the last five years.

HILARY. He's in love with you! I tell you, the man's in love with you! Do you think I'm so dazed and crazed I can't see that? You shouldn't let him, Meg! You're such a child you don't know what you're doing when you look and smile——

MARGARET [*in a strained voice*]. I do know.

[*She stands quite still in the middle of the room, her head lifted, a beautiful woman.*

HILARY [*staring at her*]. Lord, I don't wonder at him, poor brute! [*Still staring*] Meg, you've changed.

MARGARET [*catching at the opening*]. Yes, Hilary.

HILARY. Taller, more beautiful—and yet I miss something.

MARGARET [*urging him on*]. Yes, Hilary.

HILARY [*wistfully*]. —something you used to have—kind—a kind way with you. The child's got it. Sydney—my daughter, Sydney! She's more you than you are. You—you've grown right up—away—beyond me—haven't you?

MARGARET. Yes, Hilary.

HILARY. But I'm going to catch up. You'll help me to catch up with you—Meg? [*She doesn't answer.*] Meg! wait for me! Meg, where are you? Why don't you hold out your hands?

MARGARET [*wrung for him*]. I can't, Hilary! My hands are full.

HILARY [*his tone lightening into relief*]. What, Sydney? She'll be off in no time. She's told me about the boy—what's his name?—Kit—already.

MARGARET. It's not Sydney.

HILARY. What? [*Crescendo*] Eh? What are you driving at? What are you trying to tell me? What's changed you? Why do you look at me sideways? Why do you flinch when I speak loudly? Yes—and when I kissed you—— It's that man! [*He goes up to her and takes her by the wrist, staring into her face.*] Is it true? *You?*

MARGARET [*pitifully*]. I've done nothing wrong. I'm trying to tell you. I only want to tell you and make you understand. Hilary, fifteen years is a long time——

HILARY [*dully*]. Yes. I suppose it's a long time for a woman to be faithful.

MARGARET. That's it! That's the whole thing! If I'd loved you it wouldn't have been long——

HILARY [*violently, crying her down*]. You did love me once.

MARGARET [*beaten*]. Did I—once? I don't know——

[*There is a silence.*

HILARY [*without expression*]. What do you expect me to do? Forgive you?

MARGARET [*stung*]. There's nothing to forgive. [*Softening*] Oh, so much, Hilary, to forgive each other; but not that.

HILARY [*more and more roughly as he loses control of himself*]. Divorce you, then? Because I'll not do that! I'll have no dirty linen washed in the courts.

MARGARET [*forced into the open*]. Hilary, I divorced you twelve months ago.

HILARY [*shouting*]. What? What? What?

MARGARET. I divorced you——

HILARY [*beside himself*]. You're mad! You couldn't do it! You'd no cause! D'you think I'm to be put off with your lies? Am I a child? You'd no cause! Oh, I see what you're at. You want to confuse me. You want to pull wool over my eyes. You want to drive me off my head—drive me mad again. You devil! You devil! You shan't do it. I've got friends—— Sydney! Where's that girl? [*Shouting*] Sydney! Hester! All of you! Come here! Come here, I say! [SYDNEY *opens the drawing-room door.*

SYDNEY. Mother, what is it? [*She enters, followed by* MISS FAIRFIELD. *To* HILARY] What are you doing? You're frightening her.

HILARY [*wildly*]. No, no! You're not on her side. You're little Sydney—kind—my Sydney! What did you say—go slow, eh! Keep your hand here—cool, cool. [*Then, as* SYDNEY, *breaking from him, makes a movement to her mother*] Stand away from that woman!

MARGARET. Sydney, humour him.

HILARY [*at white heat*]. What was I calling you for, eh? Oh, yes, a riddle. I've got a riddle for you. There was a man at that place—

used to ask riddles—the moon told 'em to him. Just such a white face whispering out of the blue—lies! He couldn't find the answers—sent him off his head. But I know the answer. When's a wife not a wife, eh? Want to know the answer? [*Pointing to* MARGARET] When she's *this—this—this!* [*Confidentially*] She's poisoning me.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Now, Hilary! Hilary——!

HILARY. Sydney, come here! I'll tell *you*.

[SYDNEY *stands torn between the two.*

MISS FAIRFIELD. What have you done to him, Margaret?

MARGARET. I've told him the truth.

MISS FAIRFIELD. God forgive you!

HILARY [*raving*]. I tell you she's pouring poison into my ear. You remember that fellow in the play—and *his* wife? That's what she's done. If I told you what she said to me you'd think I was mad. And that's what she wants you to think. She wants to get rid of me. She's got a tame cat about the place. I'm in the way. And so she comes to me, d'you see, and tells me—what do you think? She says she's not my wife. What do you think of that?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*grimly*]. You may well ask.

MARGARET [*to* SYDNEY]. He won't listen——

SYDNEY. Sit down, darling! You're shaking.

MARGARET. He's always had these rages. It's my fault. I began at the wrong end. Hilary—it's not—I'm not what you think.

HILARY. Then what was that man doing in my house?

MARGARET. In a week I'm going to marry him.

HILARY. D'you hear her? To *me* she says this! Is she mad or am I?

MARGARET [*desperately*]. I tell you there's been a law passed——

MISS FAIRFIELD. No need for him to know that now, Margaret.

SYDNEY. Of course he has to know.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Not now.

MARGARET [*on the defensive*]. I don't know what you mean, Aunt Hester!

MISS FAIRFIELD. Let us rather thank God that he has come back in time.

MARGARET [*uneasy*]. In time? In time?

MISS FAIRFIELD. To snatch a brand from the burning.

MARGARET. I'm a free woman. I've got my divorce.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Whom God hath joined let no man put asunder.

MARGARET [*at bay*]. I'm a free woman. I'm going to marry Gray Meredith. This is a trap! Sydney!

MISS FAIRFIELD. Is this talk for a young girl to hear?

MARGARET. Sydney, you're to fetch Gray.

HILARY [*with weak violence*]. If he comes here I'll kill him.

MARGARET [*catching* SYDNEY *back*]. No, no! D'you hear him? What am I to do?

SYDNEY. It's all right, Mother! We'll manage somehow.

BASSETT [*entering*]. Doctor Alliot is in the hall, ma'am.

MARGARET [*with a gasp of relief*]. Ask him to come in here. At once.

[DR ALLIOT *trots in. He is a pleasant, roundabout, clean little old man, with a twinkling face and brisk chubby movements of the hands. He is upright and his voice is strong. He wears his seventy odd years like a good joke that he expects you to keep up, in spite of the fact that he is really your own age and understands you better than you do yourself. But behind his comfortable manner is a hint of authority which has its effect, especially on* HILARY.

DR ALLIOT. What's all this I hear? Well, well! Good afternoon, Mrs Fairfield! Good afternoon, Miss Fairfield! Merry Christmas, Sydney! Now, then, now for him! Welcome back, Fairfield! Welcome back, my boy!

HILARY. It's—it's old Alliot, isn't it?

DR ALLIOT. Your memory's all right, I see.

HILARY. I suppose they've sent for you——

DR ALLIOT. Well, well, you see, you've arrived rather unconventionally. I've been in touch with——

HILARY. That place?

DR ALLIOT. Why, yes! You may have to go back, you know. Formalities! Formalities!

HILARY. I don't mind. I'm well. I'm well, Alliot! I'm not afraid of what you'll say. I'm not afraid of any of you.

DR ALLIOT. Well, well, well! that sounds hopeful.

HILARY. But I can't go yet, doctor.

DR ALLIOT. Only for a day or two.

HILARY. It's my wife. I lost my temper. I do lose my temper. It means nothing. Go slow, eh? My wife's ill, doctor. She's not right in her head.

DR ALLIOT [*alert*]. Ah!

HILARY [*with a wave of his hand*]. So are the rest of them. Mad as hatters.

DR ALLIOT. H'm!

HILARY [*checked, glances at him keenly a moment. Then chuckling*]. Oh, you're thinking that's a delusion.

DR ALLIOT [*humouring him*]. Between you and me, it's a common one.

HILARY [*half flattered*]. Ah, we know, don't we? Served in the same shop, eh? Only the counter between us.

DR ALLIOT [*feeling his way*]. Well, well——

HILARY. But look here! She says she's not my wife.

DR ALLIOT [*enlightened*]. Oh! Oh, that's the trouble!

HILARY. She says she's not my wife.

DR ALLIOT [*soberly*]. It's a hard case, Fairfield.

HILARY. What d'you mean by that?

DR ALLIOT. It's the old wisdom of the scapegoat—"it is expedient"—how does it go?—"expedient——"

SYDNEY. "It is expedient that one man should die for the people."

DR ALLIOT. That's it! A hard word, but a true one.

HILARY. What has that got to do with me?

DR ALLIOT. Well, the situation is this——

HILARY. There is no situation. I married Meg. I fell ill. Now I'm well again. I want my wife.

DR ALLIOT. Why, yes—yes——

HILARY [*picking it up irritably*]. "Yes—yes——" "Yes—yes——" I suppose that's what you call humouring a lunatic?

DR ALLIOT. Why, I hope to be convinced, Fairfield, that that trouble's over, but——

HILARY. But you're going to lock me up again because I want my wife.

DR ALLIOT [*patiently*]. Will you let me put the case to you?

HILARY. You can put fifty cases. It makes no difference.

SYDNEY [*at his elbow, softly*]. Father, I'd listen.

HILARY [*slipping his arm through hers*]. Eh? Sydney? that you? You're not against me, Sydney?

SYDNEY. Nobody's against you. We only want you to listen.

HILARY. Well, out with it!

DR ALLIOT. D'you remember—can you throw your mind back to the beginning of the agitation against the marriage laws? No, you were a schoolboy——

HILARY. Deceased wife's sister, eh? That's the law that lets a man marry his sister-in-law and won't let a woman marry her brother-in-law. Pretty good, that, for your side of the counter.

DR ALLIOT. Well, well, that hardly matters now.

HILARY. It shows what your rotten muddle-headed laws are worth, anyhow.

SYDNEY. Father.

HILARY. All right! Go ahead! Go ahead!

DR ALLIOT. Well, as the result of that agitation—and remember, Hilary, what thousand, thousand tragedies must have had voice in such an outcry—a commission was appointed to inquire into the working of the divorce laws. It made its report, recommended certain drastic reforms, and there, I suppose, as is the way with commissions, would have been the end of the subject, if it hadn't been for the War—and the War marriages.

HILARY [*lowering*]. So that's where I come in! Margaret, is that where I come in?

DR ALLIOT. Never, I suppose, in one decade were there so many young marriages. Happy? that's another thing! Marry in haste——

MARGARET. They weren't all happy.

DR ALLIOT. But they were *young*, those boys and girls who married. As young as Kit, and as impatient as Sydney. And that saved them. That young, young generation found out, out of their own unhappiness, the War taught them, what peace couldn't teach us—that when conditions are evil it is not your duty to submit—that when conditions are evil, your duty, in spite of protests, in spite of sentiment, your duty, though you trample on the bodies of your nearest and dearest to do it, though you bleed your own heart white, your duty is to see that those conditions are changed. If your laws forbid you, you must change your laws. If your church forbids you, you must change your church; and if your God forbids you, why, then, you must change your God.

MISS FAIRFIELD. And we who will not change?

MARGARET. Or cannot change——?

DR ALLIOT. Stifle. Like a snake that can't cast its skin. Grow or perish—it's the law of life. And so, when this young generation—yours, not mine, Hilary—decided that the marriage laws were, I won't say evil, but outgrown, they set to work to change them.

MISS FAIRFIELD. You needn't think it was without protest, Hilary. I joined the Anti-Divorce League myself.

DR ALLIOT. No, it wasn't without protest. Mrs Grundy and the churches are protesting still. But in spite of protest, no man or woman to-day is bound to a drunkard, an habitual criminal, or——

HILARY. Or——?

DR ALLIOT. Or to a partner who, as far as we doctors know——

HILARY. But you can't be sure!

DR ALLIOT. I say as far as we know, is incurably insane—in practice, is insane for more than five years.

HILARY. And if he recovers? Look at me!

DR ALLIOT [*with a sigh*]. "It is expedient——"

HILARY. And you call that justice!

MARGARET. At least call it mercy. All the days of your life to stand at the window, Hilary, and watch the sun shining on the other side of the road—it's hard, it's hard on a woman.

DR ALLIOT. At least call it common sense. If a man can't live his normal life, it's as if he were dead. If he's an incurable drunkard, if he's shut away for life in prison——

HILARY. But I'm not a drunkard. I'm not a convict. I've done nothing. I've been to the War, to fight, for her, for all of you, for

my country, for this law-making machine that I've called my country. And when I've got from it, not honourable scars, not medals and glory, but sixteen years in hell, then when I get out again, then the country I've fought for, the laws I've fought for, the woman I've fought for, they say to me, "As you've done without her for fifteen years you can do without her altogether." That's what it is. When I was helpless they conspired behind my back to take away all I had from me. [*To* MARGARET] Did I ever hurt you? Didn't I love you? Didn't you love me? Could I help being ill? What have I done?

SYDNEY. You died, Father.

MARGARET. Sydney, don't be cruel.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Ah, we cry after the dead, but I've always wondered what their welcome back would be.

HILARY. Well, you know now.

DR ALLIOT. I don't say it isn't hard——

HILARY. Ah, you don't say it isn't hard. That's good of you. That's sympathy indeed. And my wife—she's full of it too, isn't she? "Poor dear! I was married to him once. I'd quite forgotten."

MARGARET. For pity's sake, Hilary!

DR ALLIOT. Why, face it, man! One of you must suffer. Which is it to be? The useful or the useless? the whole or the maimed? the healthy woman with her life before her, or the man whose children ought never to have been born?

HILARY [*in terrible appeal*]. Margaret!

SYDNEY. Is that true, Doctor Alliot? Is that true?

MARGARET [*her voice shaking*]. I think you go too far.

DR ALLIOT. Mrs Fairfield, in this matter I cannot go too far.

MISS FAIRFIELD. For me, at any rate—too far and too fast altogether! Before ladies! It's not nice. It's enough to call down a judgment.

BASSETT [*entering*]. Mr Pumphrey to see you, ma'am. [*To* SYDNEY] And Mr Kit.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*justified*]. Ah!

MARGARET. I can't see anyone.

BASSETT. He said, ma'am, it was important.

HILARY. Who? Who?

MISS FAIRFIELD. The Rector. I expect he's heard about you.

HILARY. I can't see him. I won't see him. Let me go. I've met the Levites. Spare me the priest.

[*He breaks away from them and goes stumbling out at the other door.*

SYDNEY [*following him anxiously*]. Father!

DR ALLIOT [*preventing her*]. No, no, my child! I'll look after him.

[*He goes out quickly.*

[*The* RECTOR *is an insignificant man, with an important manner and a plum in his mouth. He enters with* KIT, *who is flushed and perturbed.*

RECTOR. Ah, good afternoon, Mrs Fairfield—Miss Fairfield——

MARGARET [*mechanically. She is very tired and inattentive*]. A happy Christmas, Mr Pumphrey!

RECTOR. Ah! Just so! Christmas afternoon. An unusual day to all, Mrs Fairfield, and, I fear, an inconvenient hour——

MARGARET. Not at all, Mr Pumphrey.

RECTOR. I can give myself [*he takes out his watch*] till three-fifteen, no longer. The children's service is at three-thirty.

MARGARET [*turning to the bell*]. Mayn't I order you an early cup of tea?

RECTOR. Thank you, thank you, no. Busy as I am, I should not have disturbed you——

MISS FAIRFIELD. Rector, it's as if you had been sent!

RECTOR. Ah! gratifying! I did not see you at the morning service, Miss Fairfield. But last night—*late* last night——

MISS FAIRFIELD [*with a look at* SYDNEY]. Three A.M., Rector?

RECTOR. Three-fifteen, Miss Fairfield.

KIT. Look here, Father——

RECTOR. I received certain information from my son——

KIT. No, you don't, Father. I'll have my say first. It's just this, Mrs Fairfield——

RECTOR [*fussed*]. Christopher? Christopher?

KIT [*he is very much in earnest, and he addresses himself solely to* MARGARET]. I want you to know that it is nothing to do with me, Mrs Fairfield. I don't agree with my father. [*Confidentially*] You wouldn't think it, but I never do.

RECTOR. Christopher?

KIT [*ignoring him*]. And it was only coming up the drive that he sprung on me why he wanted to see you, or I wouldn't have come——

MARGARET [*liking him*]. I think Sydney would have been sorry, Kit.

KIT [*with a touch of his father's manner*]. Yes, well, Sydney and I have talked it over—and I know I'm going into the Church myself—but I think he's all wrong, Mrs Fairfield. [*Unconscious of plagiarism*] I'm not nineteenth century. [*But* SYDNEY *giggles.*

MISS FAIRFIELD. Rector, what's the matter with the young man?

KIT [*forging ahead*]. You see, I'm pretty keen about Sydney, and so, naturally, I'm pretty keen about you, Mrs Fairfield?

RECTOR. Miss Fairfield, I'm without words.

KIT [*burdened*]. —and I just wanted to tell you that I can't tell you what I think of my father over this business. It makes me wild.

SYDNEY. Kit, you'd better shut up.

KIT [*turning to* SYDNEY]. Well, I only wanted her to understand that I'm not responsible for my father—that he's not my own choice, if you know what I mean. [*They talk aside.*

RECTOR. His mother's right hand! I don't know what's come over him.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*grimly*]. A pretty face, Rector!

RECTOR. Ah! the very point! I shall be glad to see you alone, Mrs Fairfield—not you, of course, Miss Fairfield, but—er——

[*He glances at* KIT *and* SYDNEY.

MARGARET [*resignedly*]. Sydney, have you shown Kit all your presents?

SYDNEY [*reluctantly taking the hint, but continuing the conversation as they go out*]. What did you let him come for? Oh, you're no good!

[*The door bangs behind them.*

MARGARET [*half smiling*]. Well, Mr Pumphrey. I suppose it's about Sydney and Kit?

RECTOR. Mrs Fairfield, until last night we encouraged, we were gratified——

MARGARET. Last night? Oh, the dance!

RECTOR. I sat up for my son until three-fifteen on Christmas morning. His excuse was your daughter——

MARGARET [*with dignity*]. Do you take objection to Sydney, Mr Pumphrey?

RECTOR. Now, my dear lady, you mustn't misunderstand me——

MARGARET [*quietly*]. To me, then?

RECTOR. Mrs Fairfield, I beg—— But in the course of a slight—er—altercation between Christopher and myself it transpired——

MARGARET [*she has been prepared for it*]. I see. It's her father——

RECTOR. I am grieved—grieved for you.

MARGARET. But his illness was no secret.

RECTOR. My heart, Mrs Fairfield, and Mrs Pumphrey's heart has gone out to you in your affliction. When the light of reason——

MARGARET. Then you did know. *Then* I don't follow.

RECTOR. But according to Christopher——

MARGARET. Well?

RECTOR. Mrs Fairfield, is your husband alive or dead?

MARGARET. My former husband is alive.

RECTOR [*with a half-deprecatory, half-triumphant gesture*]. Out of your own mouth, Mrs Fairfield——

MARGARET [*bewildered*]. But you say you knew he was insane?

RECTOR. But I didn't know he was alive.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*irritated*]. Don't be so foolish, Margaret. It's not the insanity, it's the divorce.

RECTOR. When I realized that I had been within a week of remarrying a divorced person——

MARGARET [*coldly*]. Why didn't you go to Mr Meredith?

RECTOR. Mr Meredith is—er—a difficult man to—er—approach. felt that an appeal to your feelings, as a Christian, as a mother——

MARGARET. You mean you'll prevent Kit marrying Sydney——

RECTOR. It depends on you, Mrs Fairfield. I won't let him marry he child of a woman who remarries while her husband is alive.

MARGARET. But the Church allows it?

MISS FAIRFIELD [*correcting her*]. Winks at it, Margaret.

RECTOR [*with dignity*]. "Winks" is hardly the word——

MARGARET. Then what word would you use, Mr Pumphrey?

RECTOR. I am not concerned with words.

MARGARET. But I want to know. I care about my Church. It lets ne and it doesn't let me—what does it mean?

RECTOR [*much moved*]. I am not concerned with meanings, Mrs Fairield. I am concerned with my own conscience.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Margaret—you've no business to upset the Rector. Why don't you tell him that the situation has changed?

MARGARET. Nothing has changed.

RECTOR. Changed?

MISS FAIRFIELD. My nephew has recovered—returned. He's in the nouse now.

RECTOR. Providence! It's Providence! [*With enthusiasm*] I never knew anything like Providence. Changed indeed, Miss Fairfield! My objection goes. Dear little Sydney! Ah, Mrs Fairfield, in a year you and your husband will look back on this—episode as on a dream—a bad dream——

MARGARET [*stonily*]. I have no husband.

RECTOR. Ah! the remarriage—a mere formality——

MISS FAIRFIELD. Simpler still—the decree can be rescinded.

MARGARET [*stunned*]. Aunt Hester, knowing his history, knowing mine, is it possible that you expect me to go back to him?

MISS FAIRFIELD. He's come back to you.

RECTOR. A wife's duty——

MARGARET [*slowly*]. I think you're wicked. I think you're both wicked.

RECTOR. Mrs Fairfield!

MISS FAIRFIELD. Control yourself, Margaret!

MARGARET [*with a touch of wildness in her manner*]. You—do you love your wife?

RECTOR. Mrs Fairfield!

MARGARET. Do you?

RECTOR. Mrs Pumphrey and I—most attached——

MARGARET. Suppose you weren't. Think of it—to want so desperately to feel—and to feel nothing. Do you know what it means to dread a person who loves you? To stiffen at the look in their eyes. To pity and—shudder? You should not judge.

[HILARY, *unseen, opens the door and shuts it again quickly.*

RECTOR. I—I——

MISS FAIRFIELD. There it is, you see, Rector! She doesn't care *what* she says. [DR ALLIOT *enters.*

DR ALLIOT [*gravely, holding the door behind him*]. Margaret, my child—— [*He sees the others and his voice changes.*] Hullo, Pumphrey! You here still? Well, well—you're cutting it fine.

RECTOR. The service! [*He pulls out his watch, stricken.*

DR ALLIOT. I'll run you down there if you'll wait a minute. [*To* MARGARET, *privately, poking a wise forefinger*] What you want, my child, is a good cry and a cup of tea.

RECTOR [*coming up to* MARGARET *stiffly*]. Good day, Mrs Fairfield! You will not—reconsider——?

MARGARET. I will not.

RECTOR. I regret—I regret—— [*To* MISS FAIRFIELD] My dear lady, you have my sympathy. I think I left my hat——

[MISS FAIRFIELD *escorts him into the hall.*

DR ALLIOT. Hilary's coming home with me, Margaret. He wants a word with you first. Can you manage that?

MARGARET. Of course.

DR ALLIOT [*abruptly*]. Where's Meredith?

MARGARET [*eagerly*]. He's coming. He's taking me away.

DR ALLIOT. Good. The sooner the better.

RECTOR [*reappearing at the door*]. Dr Alliot—it now wants seven minutes to the half.

DR ALLIOT. Coming! Coming! See now—you can be gentle with him——

MARGARET. Of course.

DR ALLIOT [*with a keen look at her*]. Nor yet too gentle. Well, well, God be with you, child! [*He trots out.*

[HILARY *comes in, hesitating. If he is without dignity, he is, nevertheless, too much like a hectored, forlorn child to be ludicrous.*

HILARY. Have they gone? [*Reassuring her*] It's all right. I'm going too. [*He waits for her to answer. She says nothing.*] I'm going. I've got to, I see that. He's made me see.

MARGARET. Dr Alliot?

HILARY. I'm going to stay with him till I can look round. He's going to make it right with that place.

MARGARET. I'm glad you've got a good friend, Hilary.

HILARY. Yes, he's a good chap. He talked to me. He's made me
e. [*He comes a little closer.*] He says—and I do see—— It's too
te, of course—[*his look at her is a petition, but she makes no sign*] isn't
? [*He comes nearer.*] Yes—it's too late. It wouldn't be fair—to
k you—[*again the look*] would it?

MARGARET [*imploringly*]. Oh, Hilary, Hilary!

HILARY [*encouraged to come closer*]. No woman could be expected—
ou couldn't be expected—[*she makes no sign*] could you? [*Repeating
is lesson*] It's what he says—you've made a new life for yourself—
*he waits*] haven't you? There's no room in it—for me—is there?
*He is close to her. She does not move.*] So it's just a case of—say-
ng good-bye and going, because—because—I quite see—there's no
hance—— [*Suddenly he throws himself down beside her, catching at
er hands, clinging to her knees.*] Oh! Meg, Meg, Meg! isn't there
ast a chance?

MARGARET [*faintly*]. Hilary, I can't stand it.

HILARY [*and from now to the end of the scene he is at full pelt, tumbling
ver his words, frantic*]. Yes, but listen to me! Listen to me! You
on't listen. Listen to me! I've been alone so long——

MARGARET. Gray! Gray! Why don't you come?

HILARY. I'll not trouble you. I'll not get in your way—but—don't
eave me all alone. Give me something—the rustle of your dress, the
ushion where you've lain—your voice about the house. You can't
leny me such little things, that you give your servant and your dog.

MARGARET. It's madness——

HILARY. It's naked need!

MARGARET. What good should I be to you? I don't love you,
Hilary—poor Hilary. I love him. I never think of anything but him.

HILARY. But it's me you married. You promised—you promised—
etter or worse—in sickness, in health—— You can't go back on your
romise.

MARGARET. It isn't fair.

HILARY. Anything's fair! You don't know what misery means.

MARGARET. I'm learning.

HILARY. But you don't *know*. You couldn't leave me to it if you
new. Why, I've never known you hurt a creature in all your life!
Remember the rat-hunts in the barn, the way we used to chaff you?
nd the starling? and the kitten you found? Why, I've seen you
tep aside for a little creeping green thing on the path. You've never
nurt anything. Then how can you hurt me so? You can't have
hanged since yesterday——

MARGARET [*in despairing protest*]. It's half my life ago——

HILARY. It's yesterday, it's yesterday!

MARGARET [*with the fleeting courage of a half-caught bird*]. Yes, it *is*

yesterday. It's how you took me—yesterday—and now you're doing it again!

HILARY [*catching at the hope of it*]. Am I? Am I? Is it yesterday yesterday come back again?

MARGARET [*in the toils*]. No—no! Hilary, I can't!

HILARY [*at white heat*]. No, you can't. You can't leave me. You can't do it to me. You can't drive me out—the wilderness—alone—alone—alone. You can't do it, Meg—you can't do it—you can't!

MARGARET [*beaten*]. I suppose—I can't.

HILARY. You—you'll stay with me? [*Breaking down utterly*] Oh God bless you, Meg, God bless you, God bless you——

[*She resigns her hands to him while she sits, flattened against the back of her chair, quivering a little, like a crucified moth.*

MARGARET [*puzzling it out*]. You mean—God help me?

## ACT III

*The scene is the same as in Act I.* MISS FAIRFIELD *sits reading.* SYDNEY *is fidgeting about the room.* BASSETT *comes in and begins to lay the cloth.* KIT, *who enters unseen behind her, sees* MISS FAIRFIELD *and makes hastily up the stairs on tiptoes.*

SYDNEY [*turning*]. Oh, Bassett, isn't it rather early for tea? Lunch was so late.

BASSETT [*desisting*]. Oh, very well, miss.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Now, Sydney! Always trying to upset things! I'm more than ready for my tea. Bring it in at once, Bassett.

BASSETT. Very well, ma'am!

SYDNEY. Auntie, I know Mother won't want to be disturbed.

MISS FAIRFIELD. It's high time she was. Talk! Talk! No consideration. She'll tire Hilary out. [*She goes towards the drawing-room*

SYDNEY [*worried*]. Auntie, I think——

MISS FAIRFIELD. Then you shouldn't! [*She goes out*

BASSETT. Shall I bring in tea, Miss Sydney?

SYDNEY [*with a twinkle*]. I think we'll wait half an hour.

BASSETT [*with an answering twinkle*]. Very well, miss.

SYDNEY. Oh—Bassett—tell Mr Kit that—er—that the coast's clear

BASSETT. He didn't stay out with us, miss. Him and the puppy together was a bit too much for cook, with the turkey on her hands [*Looking round*] He's here somewhere, miss. [*She goes out*

SYDNEY [*addressing space*]. Kit, you idiot, come out!

KIT [*appearing at the head of the stairs*]. I spend half my life dodging your aunt. [*As he runs downstairs he rakes a bunch of mistletoe from the top of a picture.*] She spoilt the whole effect this morning, but now—— [*He advances on* SYDNEY.

SYDNEY [*enjoying herself*]. What do you want now?

KIT [*chanting*]. "The mistletoe hung in the old oak hall!"

SYDNEY [*eluding him*]. Shut up, Kit!

[*They dodge and scuffle like two puppies till the drawing-room door opens, letting in the sound of voices.*

KIT. Sst!

[*He dashes up the stairs and comes down again much more soberly as* SYDNEY *says over her shoulder:*

SYDNEY. It's only Mother.

[MARGARET *comes dragging into the room, shutting the door behind her.*

SYDNEY [*the laughter dying out of her*]. Oh, Mother, how white you look!

MARGARET. Has Kit gone?

SYDNEY No, but I can get rid of him if you want me to.

MARGARET. I want him to wait. I want him to take a letter for me to Gray.

SYDNEY. Do you want Gray to come here?

MARGARET. I want him not to come here.

SYDNEY. Oh, I see, not till after Father's gone.

MARGARET. He's not going.

SYDNEY. Mother! [MARGARET *looks at her with twitching lips.*

SYDNEY. Mother, you haven't——

MARGARET. I can't talk to you now, Sydney.

SYDNEY. But, Mother——

MARGARET. Please.

SYDNEY. But, Mother——

MARGARET. Ask Kit to wait a few minutes.

SYDNEY. But——

[MARGARET *goes into the inner room, and sits down to write at a little desk near the window. Her back is turned to them, and she is soon absorbed in her letter.* SYDNEY *stands deep in thought.*

KIT [*at the foot of the stairs*]. All serene?

[SYDNEY *makes no answer.* KIT *prances up behind her with the bunch of mistletoe.*

KIT [*repeating his success*]. "The mistletoe hung in the old oak hall!"

SYDNEY [*violently*]. Oh, for God's sake, stop it!

KIT [*quenched*]. What's the row?

SYDNEY. You never know when to stop.

KIT. Well, you needn't snap out at a person——

SYDNEY [*impulsively*]. Sorry! Oh, sorry, old man! I'm jump to-day.

KIT [*chaffing her*]. Nervy old thing!

SYDNEY [*stricken*]. I—I suppose I am.

KIT. One minute you're as nice as pie, and then you fizz up like Seidlitz powder, all about nothing.

SYDNEY All about nothing. Sorry, my old Kit, sorry! [*She flings herself down on the sofa. Then with an effort*] Come and talk. What the news?

KIT. I told you it all this morning. What's yours?

SYDNEY. I like yours better. How's the pamphlet going?

KIT. Nearly done. I put in all your stuff.

SYDNEY [*absently*]. Good.

KIT. Though, you know, I don't agree with it. What I feel is—you're not listening.

SYDNEY [*slowly*]. Kit, talking of that paper—I read somewhere—suppose now—is it true it can skip a generation?

KIT. It? What?

SYDNEY. Oh—any illness. Consumption or—well, say insanity. Suppose—*you*, for instance—suppose you were a queer family—a little you know. Say your mother or your father was queer—and you weren't. You were perfectly fit, you understand, perfectly fit——

KIT. Well?

SYDNEY. What about the children?

KIT. I wouldn't risk it. Thank the Lord your father's only shell shock.

SYDNEY. Why?

KIT. You can't pass on shell-shock.

SYDNEY. Then you can pass on insanity—even if you're fit yourself.

KIT. Of course you can.

SYDNEY. It would be very wicked, wouldn't it—to children? Oh it would be wicked! I suppose when people are in love they don't think.

KIT. Won't think.

SYDNEY. But isn't there a school that says there's no such thing as heredity?

KIT. Well, all I know is I wouldn't risk it.

SYDNEY. It—it's hard on people.

KIT. My word, yes. They say that's why old Alliot never married.

SYDNEY [*high and mightily*]. Oh, village gossip.

KIT [*apologetically*]. Well, you know what the Mater is.

SYDNEY [*abandoning her dignity*]. Who was it, Kit?

KIT. Old Miss Robson.

SYDNEY. Rot!

KIT. Fact.

SYDNEY. But she's all right.

KIT. Had a game sister.

SYDNEY. Of course! I just remember her. She used to scare me.

KIT. Oh, it must be true. They're such tremendous pals still.

SYDNEY. Poor old things!

KIT. Rotten for her.

SYDNEY. Rottener for him! What did she go on being pals with him for?

KIT. Why shouldn't she?

SYDNEY. Well, it stopped him marrying anyone else. She oughtn't to have let him.

KIT. You can't stop a person being fond of you.

SYDNEY. When it's a man you can.

KIT. My dear girl, you don't know what you're talking about.

SYDNEY. My dear boy, if a girl finds out that it's not right for her to marry a man, it's up to her to choke him off.

KIT. Rot!

SYDNEY. Well, I think so.

KIT. Couldn't be done.

SYDNEY. Couldn't it just?

KIT. Any man would see through it.

SYDNEY. As if any man ever saw through anything! As if I couldn't choke you off in five minutes if I wanted to!

KIT. I'd like to see you try!

SYDNEY. Would you?

KIT. My dear girl, we're not all fools where women are concerned.

SYDNEY. I admire your air of conviction.

KIT. Don't be clever-clever, old thing. Be——

[*His arm slips round her.*

SYDNEY [*edging away*]. Don't.

KIT [*he glances round hastily at* MARGARET, *but she is deep in writing*]. Why not?

SYDNEY [*deliberately*]. I hate being pawed. [*A pause.*

KIT. Look here, Sydney, d'you call this a way of spending Christmas afternoon?

SYDNEY [*her lip quivering*]. It isn't much of a way, is it?

KIT. Well, then, old thing! [*Again the arm.*

SYDNEY [*icily*]. I told you to leave me alone.

KIT [*rising, huffed*]. Oh, well, if you can't be decent, I'm going.

SYDNEY [*sweetly*]. Counter-attraction?

KIT [*wheeling round on her*]. Now, my dear old thing, look here. I know it's only a sort of way you've got into; but when you say—"men!"—with a sort of sneer, and "other attractions"—like that, in that voice, it just sounds cheap. I hate it. It's not like you. I wish you wouldn't.

SYDNEY. Dear me!

KIT. Now I suppose you're annoyed?

SYDNEY. Oh, no, I'm only amused.

KIT [*heavily*]. There's nothing amusing about me, Sydney I'm in earnest.

SYDNEY. I'm sure you are. You got out of answering an innocent little question quite neatly. It looks like practice.

KIT [*harried*]. Now, look here, Sydney, I swear to you——

SYDNEY [*like the ghost in "Hamlet"*]. Swear!

KIT. If you're thinking of Alice Hewitt, I've only met her four times.

SYDNEY. Oh, so her name's Alice!

KIT. Didn't you know?

SYDNEY. Never heard of her till this minute.

KIT. Then what on earth have you been driving at?

SYDNEY. Trying an experiment.

KIT. If it's because you're jealous——

SYDNEY. Jealous! Jealous of a—— What colour are her eyes?

KIT [*carelessly*]. How'd I know?

SYDNEY [*with a sudden spurt of suspicion*]. Kit! What colour are mine?

KIT [*helplessly*]. Oh, er—oh——

SYDNEY [*terribly*]. Kit! What colour are mine? [*Relenting*] Look at my frock, you donkey! What do you suppose I wear blue for? So Alice has got blue eyes!

KIT. How do you know?

SYDNEY. I know you, Kit. You're conservative.

KIT. As a matter of fact, she isn't unlike you. That's what made me talk to her.

SYDNEY. Oh, you've talked to her?

KIT [*warming*]. Oh, yes—quite a lot. She's a friend of my sister's.

SYDNEY. She always is.

KIT. What d'you mean—"she always is"? I tell you I've only met her four times. I can't make you out.

SYDNEY. No?

KIT. I wish I could make you out.

SYDNEY [*an ache in her voice*]. Oh, I wish you could.

KIT [*responding instantly*]. I say, old thing, is anything really the matter?

SYDNEY [*with a glance at* MARGARET]. I'm worried.

KIT. Oh, that! Yes, it's beastly for your mother.

SYDNEY. Oh, it's not that. At least——

KIT. What?

SYDNEY [*lightly*]. Oh, I don't know.

KIT [*puzzled*]. Can't you tell me?

SYDNEY. No, old man.

KIT [*as in Act I*]. But—look here—marriage has got to be a sort of mutual show, hasn't it? Confidence and all that?

[SYDNEY *goes off into a peal of laughter.*

KIT. What's the matter now?

SYDNEY. Do you preach this sort of sermon to Alice?

KIT. Sydney—that's—that's rude—that's—that's——

SYDNEY. Take time, darling!

KIT. You're being simply insulting.

SYDNEY. Too bad! I should go and tell Alice.

KIT. Damn Alice!

SYDNEY. Oh, no, Kit, she's got blue eyes.

KIT [*storming*]. Look here, what's up?

SYDNEY. Nix.

KIT. Have you really got your back up? What's the matter with you, Sydney?

SYDNEY. D'you want to know?

KIT [*with a certain dignity*]. I think I'd better.

SYDNEY. Well, it's [*yawning*] "jam to-morrow, jam yesterday, but——" Surely you know how it ends?

KIT. I don't. And I don't want to.

SYDNEY [*drearily*]. "But never jam to-day."

KIT [*startled*]. Why, Sydney!

SYDNEY [*recovering herself, lightly*]. D'you know what that's out of?

KIT. No.

SYDNEY [*mischievously*]. You ought to—*Alice*——

[KIT *makes a furious gesture.*

SYDNEY [*appeasing him*]. No, no, no! *Alice Through the Looking-glass*! [*More soberly*] I can't help it, Kit. When I look in the looking-glass I see—Alice.

KIT. Once and for all, Sydney, will you shut up about Alice?

SYDNEY. Can't. It's her jam to-day.

KIT. I wish you'd talk sense for a change.

SYDNEY. But I am. I'm conveying to you as nicely and tactfully as possible that I'm——

KIT [*apprehensive at last*]. What, Sydney?

SYDNEY. Tired of jam.

KIT [*heavily*]. D'you mean you're tired of me?

SYDNEY. That would be putting it crudely.

KIT. What's got into you? I don't know you.

SYDNEY. P'raps you're beginning to.

KIT. But what have I done?

SYDNEY [*flaring effectively*]. Well, for one thing you shouldn't have told your father we were engaged. What girl, do you suppose, would stand it? You ask Alice.

KIT [*flaring in reality*]. If you're not jolly careful I will.

SYDNEY [*egging him on*]. Good for you!

KIT [*furious*]. And if I do I'll ask her more than that.

SYDNEY [*clapping her hands*]. I should go and do it now, if I were you. Strike while the iron's hot.

KIT. You're mad.

SYDNEY [*with intense bitterness*]. Yes, I suppose that's the right word to fling at me.

KIT [*between injury and distress*]. I never meant that. You're twisting the words in my mouth. You're just picking a quarrel.

SYDNEY [*lazily*]. Well, what's one to do with a little boy who won't take his medicine? I tried to give it you in jam.

KIT [*curt*]. You want me to go?

SYDNEY. Yes.

KIT. For good?

SYDNEY. Yes.

KIT. Honest?

SYDNEY. Yes.

KIT. Right. [*He turns from her and goes out.*

MARGARET [*looking up*]. Was that Kit? Sydney, don't let him go.

SYDNEY. Kit! Ki-it!

KIT [*returning joyfully*]. Yes! Yes, old thing?

SYDNEY [*impassively*]. Mother wants you.

MARGARET. Oh, Kit—would you take this for me? It's for Mr Meredith. I expect you'll meet him, but if not, I want you to take it on. At once, Kit.

KIT. Right, Mrs Fairfield!

MARGARET [*detaining him*]. What's the matter, Kit?

KIT [*his head up*]. Nothing, Mrs Fairfield.

SYDNEY. Mother, Kit's got to go.

KIT [*resentfully*]. It's all right. I'm going. You needn't worry.

MARGARET [*humorously, washing her hands of them*]. Oh, you two!

[*She turns away from them and stands, her arm on the mantelpiece, staring into the fire.* KIT *marches to the door.*

SYDNEY [*in spite of herself, softly*]. Kit!

KIT [*quickly*]. Yes?

SYDNEY [*recovering herself, impishly*]. You'll give her my love?

KIT. You're a beast, Sydney Fairfield! [*He goes out with a slam.*

SYDNEY [*in a changed voice*]. You'll give her *my* love. [*Running to the door*] Kit!

[*The door opens again, but it is* GRAY MEREDITH *who comes in.*

GRAY. Sydney, what's wrong with Kit? He went past me like a gust of wind.

MARGARET [*coming up to them*]. He didn't give you my note?

GRAY. He never looked at me. What note?

MARGARET. I——

GRAY. Aren't you ready? Why aren't you dressed?

MARGARET. I——

GRAY. You must be quick, dearest.

MARGARET. I—— [*She sways where she stands.*

[GRAY *goes to her, and, half clinging to him, half repulsing him, she sits down with her arm on the table and her head on her arm.*

GRAY. Of course! Worn out! You should have come an hour ago.

MARGARET. Yes.

GRAY. Never mind that now. Sydney, get your mother's wraps.

MARGARET [*agitated*]. Sydney—wait—no.

GRAY. Warm things. It's bitter, driving.

SYDNEY [*uncertainly*]. Gray, I think——

GRAY. Get them, please.

[*After a tiny pause and look at him* SYDNEY *obeys. You see her go upstairs and disappear along the gallery.*

GRAY [*solicitous*]. I was afraid it would come hard on you. Has he——? But you can tell me all that later.

MARGARET. I must tell it you now.

GRAY. Be quick, then. We've got a fifty-mile drive before us.

MARGARET [*not looking at him*]. I—I'm not coming.

GRAY [*smiling*]. Not? There, sit quiet a moment. My dear—my dear heart—you're all to pieces.

MARGARET. I'm not coming.

GRAY [*checking what he takes for hysteria*]. Margaret—Margaret——

MARGARET. I'm not coming. It's Hilary.

GRAY. What? Collapsed again? I thought as much.

MARGARET. I——

GRAY. Tragic! But—it simplifies his problem, poor devil. Has Alliot charge of him?

MARGARET. No, no. It's not that. He's not ill. He's well. That's it. He's well—and—he won't let me go.

GRAY. He won't, won't he? [*He turns from her.*

MARGARET. Where are you going?

GRAY. To settle this matter. Where is he?

MARGARET. Leave him alone. It's me you must punish. I've made

up my mind. Oh, how am I to tell you? He convinced me. He—cried, Gray. [*Then, as* GRAY *makes a quick gesture*] You mustn't sneer. You must understand. He's so unhappy. And there's Sydney to think of. And, Gray, he won't marry us.

GRAY. What's that?

MARGARET. The Rector. He's been here.

GRAY [*furious*]. My God, why wasn't I?

MARGARET. And Aunt Hester—she made it worse. [*Despairingly*] You see what it is—they all think I'm wicked.

GRAY. Damned insolence!

MARGARET. But it's not them—it's Hilary. I did fight them. I can't fight Hilary. I see it. It's my own fault. I ought never to have let myself care for you.

GRAY. Talk sense.

MARGARET. But there it is. It's too much for me. I've got to stay with him.

GRAY [*for the first time taking her seriously*]. Say that again, Margaret if you dare——

MARGARET. I've got to—stay—— [*With a sharp crying note in her voice*] Gray, Gray, don't look at me like that!

[*He turns abruptly away from her and walks across to the hearth. He stands a moment, deep in thought, takes out and lights a cigarette, realizes what he is doing, and with an exclamation flings it into the fire. Then he comes to* MARGARET, *who has not moved.*

GRAY [*very quietly*]. This—this is rather an extraordinary statement, isn't it?

MARGARET [*shrinking*]. Don't use—that tone.

GRAY. I am being as patient as I can. But—it's not easy.

MARGARET. Easy——?

GRAY. Do you mind telling me exactly what you mean?

MARGARET. I can't talk. You know I'm not clever. I'm trying to do what's right——

GRAY. Then shall I tell you?

[MARGARET *makes a little quick movement with her hands, but she says nothing.*

GRAY [*watching her keenly while he speaks*]. You mean that you've made a mistake——

MARGARET [*misunderstanding*]. Yes.

GRAY. —that the last five years goes for nothing—that you don't care for me.

MARGARET. Gray!

GRAY. Wait. That you've never cared for me—that you don't want to marry me——

MARGARET. How can you say these things to me?

GRAY. But aren't they true?

MARGARET. You know—you know they're not true.

GRAY. Then what do you mean when you say, "I won't come"?

MARGARET. I mean—Hilary. I've got to put him first because—because he's weak. You—you're strong.

GRAY. Not strong enough to do without my birthright. I want my wife and my children. I've waited a long while for you. Now you must come.

[SYDNEY *comes down the stairs, a red furred cloak over her arm. She pauses a few steps from the bottom, afraid to break in on them.*

MARGARET. If Hilary's left alone he'll go mad again.

GRAY. Margaret—come.

MARGARET. How can I?

GRAY. Margaret, my own heart—come.

MARGARET. You oughtn't to torture me. I've got to do what's right.

GRAY [*darkening*]. Are you coming with me? I shan't ask it again.

MARGARET. Oh, God—You hear him! What am I to do?

[SYDNEY *comes down another step.*

GRAY. Why, you're to do as you choose. I shan't force you. I'm not your turn-key. I'm not your beggar. We're free people, you and I. It's for you to say if you'll keep your—conscience, do you call it?—and lose——

MARGARET. I've lost what I love. There's no more to lose.

GRAY. You sing as sweetly as a toy nightingale. Almost I'd think you were real.

MARGARET [*wounded*]. I don't know what you mean.

GRAY. "What you love!" You don't know the meaning of the notes you use.

MARGARET [*very white, but her voice is steady*]. Don't deceive yourself. I love you. I ache and faint for you. I starve——

SYDNEY [*appalled, whispering*]. What is it? I don't know her.

MARGARET. I'm withering without you like cut grass in the sun. I love you. I love you. Can't you see how it is with me? But——

GRAY. There's no 'but' in love.

MARGARET. What is it in me? There's a thing I can't do. I can't see such pain.

GRAY [*hoarsely*]. Do you think *I* can't suffer?

MARGARET. I *am* you. But he—he's so defenceless. It's vivisection—like cutting a dumb beast about to make me well. I can't do it. I'd rather die of my cancer.

GRAY [*the storm breaking*]. Die then—you fool—you fool!

[SYDNEY *descends another step. The cloak slides from her hand on to the baluster.*

GRAY [*without expression*]. Good-bye.

MARGARET [*blindly*]. Forgive——

GRAY. How can I?

MARGARET. I would you——

GRAY. D'you think I bear you malice? It's not I. Why, to deny me that's a little thing. I'll not go under because you're faithless. But what you're doing is the sin without forgiveness. You're denying—not me—but life. You're denying the spirit of life. You're denying—you're denying your mate.

SYDNEY [*strung up to breaking-point*]. Mother, you shall not.

MARGARET [*as they both turn*]. Sydney!

SYDNEY [*coming down to them*]. I tell you—I tell you, you shall not.

MARGARET [*sitting down, with a listless gesture*]. I must. There's no way out.

SYDNEY. There is. For *you* there is. I've thought it all along, and now I know. Father—he's my job, not yours.

MARGARET [*with a last flicker of passion*]. D'you think I'll make a scapegoat of my own child?

SYDNEY [*sternly*]. Can you help it? I'm his child. [*She throws herself down beside her.*] Mother! Mother darling, don't you see? You're no good to him. You're scared of him. But I'm his own flesh and blood. I know how he feels. I'll make him happier than you can. Be glad for me. Be glad I'm wanted somewhere.

MARGARET [*struggling against the hope that is flooding her*]. But Kit, Sydney—Kit?

SYDNEY [*with a queer little laugh that ends, though it does not begin, quite naturally*]. Bless him, I'll be dancing at his wedding in six months.

MARGARET. But all you ought to have——

SYDNEY [*jumping up flippantly*]. Oh, I'm off getting married. I'm going to have a career.

MARGARET. —the love—the children——

SYDNEY [*strained*]. No children for me, Mother. No children for me. I've lost my chance for ever.

MARGARET [*weakly*]. No—no——

SYDNEY [*smiling down at her*]. But you—you take it. I give it to you.

MARGARET. But——

SYDNEY [*dominant*]. What's the use of arguing? I've made up my mind.

MARGARET. But if your father——

SYDNEY [*at the end of her endurance*]. Go away, Mother. Go away quickly. This is my job, not yours.

[*She turns abruptly from them to the window, and stands staring out into the darkening garden.*

MARGARET [*dazed*]. So—so—— [*She sways, hesitating, unbelieving, like a bird at the open door of its cage.*] So—I can come.

[GRAY *makes no answer.*

MARGARET [*with a new full note in her voice*]. Gray, I can come.

GRAY [*without moving*]. Can you, Margaret?

MARGARET [*in heaven*]. I can come.

GRAY [*impassively*]. Are you sure?

MARGARET [*in quick alarm*]. What do you mean?

GRAY [*stonily*]. Why, you could deny me. You've chopped and changed. I want proof that you've still a right to come.

MARGARET [*like a child*]. You're angry with me?

GRAY. No.

MARGARET. You're angry with me.

GRAY. I want proof.

MARGARET. I get frightened. I'm made so. Always I've been afraid—of Hilary—of every one—of life. But now—you—you're angry, you're so angry, you're very angry with me—and I—— [*She goes steadily across the room to him. He makes no movement.*] I'm not afraid. [*She puts up her hands, and drawing him down to her kisses him on the mouth.*] Is that proof?

GRAY [*quietly*]. Proof enough. Come.

[*He takes the cloak and throws it round her. They go out together. As* SYDNEY, *forgotten, stands looking after them,* BASSETT *enters with the tea-tray. She puts it down on the table and turns up the lights.*

BASSETT. Is the gentleman staying to tea, miss?

SYDNEY [*correcting her*]. Mr Fairfield. It's my father, Bassett.

BASSETT. We thought so, miss.

SYDNEY [*smiling faintly*]. Did you, Bassett?

BASSETT. He's got your way, miss! Quick-like! [*She opens the drawing-room door.*] Tea's ready, ma'am.

[*Outside the motor drives away.*

MISS FAIRFIELD [*entering with* HILARY]. Tea's very late.

[BASSETT *goes out.*

HILARY. I thought I heard the sound of a car. [*Suspiciously*] Where's your mother?

SYDNEY. She's gone away.

HILARY [*stricken*]. Gone?

SYDNEY. Gone away for good.

HILARY. Where?

SYDNEY. Out of our lives

HILARY. With——?

SYDNEY [*quickly*]. Out of our lives.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*furiously*]. This is your doing, Sydney.

HILARY [*dazed*]. Gone. Everything gone.

SYDNEY. I'm not gone.

HILARY. But that boy——?

SYDNEY. That's done with.

MISS FAIRFIELD. You've jilted him?

SYDNEY. Yes.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Like mother, like daughter.

SYDNEY. Just so.

MISS FAIRFIELD. I pray you get your punishment.

SYDNEY. Your prayers will surely be answered, Auntie.

HILARY [*slowly*]. It was a cruel thing to do.

SYDNEY. He'll get over it. Men—they're not like us.

HILARY [*timidly*]. You loved him?

SYDNEY. What's that to anyone but me?

HILARY [*peering at her*]. You're crying.

SYDNEY. I'm not.

HILARY. You love him?

SYDNEY. I suppose so.

HILARY. Then why? Then why?

SYDNEY. We're in the same boat, Father.

MISS FAIRFIELD. Yes, that's the way they talk now, Hilary. They know too much, the young women. It upsets everything.

[HILARY *sits down on the sofa.*

HILARY [*broken*]. I don't see ahead. I don't see what's to become of me. There's no one.

SYDNEY. There's me.

HILARY [*not looking at her*]. I should think you hate me.

SYDNEY. I need you just as badly as you need me.

HILARY [*fiercely*]. It's your damn clever doing that she went. D'you think I can't hate you?

SYDNEY [*close to him*]. No, no, Father, you want me too much. We'll make a good job of it yet.

HILARY [*his head in his hands*]. What job?

SYDNEY [*petting him, coaxing him, loving him, her hands quieting his twitching hands, her strong will already controlling him*]. Living. I've got such plans already, Father—Father dear. We'll do things. We'll have a good time somehow, you and I—you and I. Did you know you'd got a clever daughter? Writing—painting—acting! We'll go on tour together. We'll make a lot of money. We'll have a cottage somewhere. You see, I'll make it up to you. I'll make you proud of me.

MISS FAIRFIELD [*surveying them*]. Proud of her! D'you see, Hilary?

That's all she thinks of—self—self—self! Money, ambition—and sends that poor boy away. A parson's son! Not good enough for her, that's what it is. She's like the rest of the young women. Hard as nails! Hard as nails!

SYDNEY [*crying out*]. Don't you listen to her, Father! Father, don't believe her! I'm not hard. I'm not hard.

[*His arm goes round her with a gesture, awkward, timid, yet fatherly.*

# AT MRS BEAM'S

## By C. K. MUNRO

*First produced by the Stage Society in* 1921. *Subsequently revised, and in this revised form first produced at the Everyman Theatre, London, March* 1923

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

*(in the order of their appearance)*

Miss Shoe
Mr Durrows
Miss Cheezle
Mrs Bebb
James Bebb
Mrs Stone
Miss Newman
*permanent boarders at Mrs Beam's*

Mrs Beam, *a boarding-house keeper*

Mr Dermott
Laura Pasquale
Colin Langford
*temporary boarders at Mrs Beam's*

*AT MRS BEAM'S* is the comedy which best represents one of the two distinct methods of Mr C. K. Munro. *The Rumour* is representative of his other method, and critical opinion is inclined to regard it as the best of his plays. The method of *The Rumour* may be described as *English* expressionism, bearing, that is, a relationship to the expressionism of Kaiser and Toller similar to that borne by a *Punch* cartoon to the typical Continental caricature. It is, like all war plays written since the War, an anti-war play, and, as Mr James Agate has pointed out, has influenced the American collaborators who wrote *Spread-eagle*—a play, in fact, which it is almost fair to call *The Rumour* made over again for a popular audience.

*The Rumour* is, however, an exceedingly long play: for that reason it has been found preferable to exemplify Mr Munro's work by the following comedy, which, while normal in construction, passed the triple tests of production by the Stage Society and by theatres in London and New York. His *Progress* belongs to the same class as *The*

*Rumour*, but *Storm, or The Battle of Tinderly Down* is written in the manner of *At Mrs Beam's*.

In discussing the work of Mr Munro it may be appropriate to quote from an essay, *On With the Motley*, from the pen of Mr Harold Brighouse: "In any case, 'Truth first' was the motto of the new drama, which set about its business of truth-telling in a plain-dealing, naturalistic way, eschewing high-flown symbols. The first implication of 'Truth first' is that human beings are interesting, in opposition to the cavalier view that nobody can interest in the theatre unless he or she has no need to earn a living. After Ibsen and the *Plays for Puritans* the foundations of drama were extended and grew sounder for the expansion. Truth evicted artifice, possibly at the cost of substituting some veracious ugliness for some meretricious beauty. The scoffing cavalier said that drama had been driven out of the drawing-room into the kitchen: it is just to say that it left the *monde* for the world where affairs were not of necessity love affairs."

It is interesting to recall that *At Mrs Beam's* was the first of the many plays that have been produced at one of the small outlying theatres and later transferred.

# ACT I

## Scene 1

*The drawing-room at* Mrs Beam's *boarding-house, Notting Hill Gate. The room has a fireplace in the middle of the back wall, and to the left a square recess. The door is left, and the window right.*

Time: *Seven o'clock in the evening.*

Miss Shoe, *a spinster, very pretty twenty-five years ago;* Mrs Bebb, *an elaborate Irish lady;* Mr Durrows, *a tall, unsuccessful, weak-kneed man of middle age; and* Old Miss Cheezle—*always known as* "Old" Miss Cheezle—*a little hard, spectacled person of seventy, sit round.* Miss Shoe *and* Mrs Bebb *on the settee, the former on the left end and the latter the right end;* Mr Durrows *on chair right of settee, and* Miss Cheezle *on chair right of table—the latter on the particular chair on which she always sits.* James Bebb, Mrs Bebb's *son, stands at stool down left, with a gramophone on it. As the curtain rises a noisy record bursts forth. Conversation is impossible.* James Bebb's *method of appreciating the music is to stand bent into a right angle with his eyes on a level with the machine, observing the revolutions of the record. All the while the record is playing* Miss Shoe *is busy discoursing with curious sharp gestures to* Mrs Bebb, *who looks very imperturbable. Presently* James Bebb *takes the sound-box off and there is silence, but he continues to fiddle with the paraphernalia of the gramophone all through the scene.*

Miss Shoe [*as soon as she can be heard*]. Yes, it's curious how mistakes like that get about. There are two of them, you see, not one. Mr Durrows, I was telling Mrs Bebb that there are two Mr Lloyd Georges, not one as is commonly supposed. Now you can support me in that assertion, Mr Durrows, I'm sure?

Mr Durrows [*vaguely*]. Eh . . .

Miss Shoe. I say you can support me in what I say. Men always know these things so much better.

Mr Durrows [*vaguely*]. Yes . . . oh, yes. And I believe that——

Mrs Bebb [*to* James]. Why did you stop it, dear?

James [*in a loud, rough voice*]. Oh, I was getting bored with it. . . . Besides, that's the only decent part. The rest of that one's all soft—

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not nearly so decent. I've got a better one though, I'll put on for you in a minute.

Miss Shoe. Wonderful these modern inventions are, aren't they? I was reading a book last winter, a very interesting book it was—it had various articles, you know, by different authors on different subjects, don't you see, and it said that——

Mr Durrows [*in an oily, tearful voice*]. Dear me—very remarkable! Now my collection of books at home——

Miss Shoe. Yes, quite, but wait till I tell you; this book said in a certain place [*she holds her right hand out, jerking it about to make her points*] that the electricity in a gramophone is unlike any other sort, and that it is obtained through the agency of trees. Now I call that very interesting. [*To* Mrs Bebb] Don't you call that interesting, dear?

Mr Durrows. Trees . . . yes. Well, my collection of books at home contains certain——

James [*in a loud voice*]. But there isn't any electricity in a gramophone.

Miss Shoe. Oh, but surely, my dear boy. [*Seriously*] Surely; why, that's what produces the sounds, isn't it? At least I'm sure so I've always heard, though of course you were at school last, I know. [*To* Mrs Bebb] How tall he's getting! He positively seems to grow every day, my nephew does. [*To* Mr Durrows] You know, Mr Durrows, that this is my nephew, and I'm his Auntie Lilly. Am I not, dear boy? Yes, I'm one of the family. [*To* Mrs Bebb] Am I not, dear?

James. Well, I think you're an absolute dud. A gramophone doesn't go by electricity. [*He kneels on the floor.*

Mr Durrows. What I was going to say was——

[*Enter* Mrs Stone, *a fair-haired, dollish girl, and* Miss Newman, *a tall, thin, copper-haired girl, bosom friend of* Mrs Stone. *The two girls have hats, etc., on, as though they had just come into the house.*

Mrs Stone. No, Lena, you give it to him, I daren't!

[*She giggles excitedly, and doesn't dare to glance round the room where she thinks* Mr Dermott *is.*

Miss Newman [*similarly*]. No, I daren't!

[*She giggles desperately and holds a little parcel as they advance.*

Mrs Stone. Oh, he isn't here!

[*They look at each other and laugh again.*

Miss Shoe. Who is it you want, dear?

Miss Newman [*giggling still*]. Mr Dermott. Dolly here's brought him something she wants to give him.

Mrs Stone. Oh, Lena, shut up, will you!

[*They are again convulsed, and* Miss Newman *steps back, touching* Old Miss Cheezle's *leg.* Miss Cheezle *at once gives a start and makes a noise as if caused by sharp pain.*

MR DURROWS [*not noticing, to* MISS NEWMAN]. Oh, what is it?

MISS CHEEZLE [*with awful significance*]. My bad leg!

MISS SHOE [*distressed*]. Oh, my dear Miss Cheezle. [*To* MISS NEWMAN] Dear, you really should be careful.

MISS NEWMAN [*impolitely offhand*]. Oh, sorry, Miss Cheezle.

[*She tries to go on laughing, but somehow for the moment laughter is extinguished, and there is a strained pause.*

MISS CHEEZLE. Oh, it's all right. You can't be expected to worry about an old woman like me. We have no right to be in the world. We ought to have died long ago. . . .

MISS SHOE [*rising*]. Oh, Miss Cheezle, can we get you anything?

[*She breaks off as* MISS CHEEZLE *rubs and feels her leg mournfully, and then is once more rigid. A few seconds' pause, and* MISS CHEEZLE'S *influence evaporates. The girls look at each other and are convulsed afresh. Meanwhile* MISS CHEEZLE *has risen and is preparing to go out. A step is heard on the landing.*

MR DURROWS [*rising in an absurd, oily, paternal manner*]. What is it you have for him? Mayn't we see?

MISS NEWMAN. Oh, Dolly, I believe that's him!

MRS STONE. Where? [*Excitedly*] Oh, come on! Quick! We must catch him!

[*They rush for the door, but have reckoned without* OLD MISS CHEEZLE, *who puts on her slowest, most ancient and huddled manner, once even stopping, just in the doorway, and turning back as if she had forgotten something, and completely blocking the way. They disappear down the stairs in this way,* MISS CHEEZLE *snail-like, the two girls desperate behind her. The front door bangs faintly downstairs.* MISS SHOE *gets up and goes over and shuts the door, which has been left open, and then peers eagerly out of the window to the left, down into the street.*

MR DURROWS [*who has been left standing, sitting down once more*]. Talking of singers . . . there used to be a very good singer in this country. I don't know whether there are any now. They're very few and far between, I believe. But this man was a very good singer. Italian he was. Buffo, or Tuffo, or some such name. He would go lower down than anyone else I ever heard. Away down he could go.

MRS BEBB [*busy knitting*]. Those girls seem very fond of Mr Dermott. I wonder what his wife thinks about it. . . .

MR DURROWS. Yes, and he could go quite high too. I don't mean, of course, as high as a soprano or that. But quite high. . . .

MRS BEBB. She ought to look after him better than that, that's no way to let a man go on at all. [*A door has banged faintly downstairs.*

Miss Shoe. There! He's gone out! I'm just looking—[*she looks again*]—I was just looking to see if I could see the way he walks down the street. . . But it isn't him. [*Coming back*] Do you know, you can always tell a man's character from the way he walks down a street? I was reading a book, and it said so, and I've always found it true. When I read that I said to myself, "the man who wrote that was a wise man, because it's quite true." [*She sits on the settee again. Pause.*

Mr Durrows. That's—er—a dreadful thing about the Paris murderer. Did you read about it last night?

Miss Shoe. D'you know, it's a remarkable thing you should mention that because——

Mrs Bebb [*vaguely*]. No. . . . I'm afraid I didn't read about him.

James [*still busy at the gramophone*]. Oh, Mother! he kills a hundred women in a week, and eats them alive.

Miss Shoe. Oh, no, dear boy, not as much as that, not as much as that, but——

James. Well, that's what I heard, anyway—at least it wasn't as good as that, but I add a bit on when I tell it.

Miss Shoe. No, but really it's most——

Mr Durrows. It's a most dreadful affair. This man——

Miss Shoe. My dear, a Bluebeard. A positive Bluebeard, and nothing else. He gets hold of women——

James. A hundred of them a day.

Miss Shoe. —and he locks them up, and makes them—well, makes them like—live with him, don't you see? And then he kills them, and cuts up their bodies [*she makes a sharp gesture with her hand, and pauses*] —cuts up their bodies, just like that. He's killed thirty-nine already that way. [*Enter* Miss Cheezle. *She returns to her former position.*

Mr Durrows [*dreamily*]. Oh, an immoral character, there's no doubt . . .

Miss Shoe. One paper even says he drinks their blood and eats their flesh.

James. They've found the knife and fork, you know.

Mr Durrows. Oh no, I should say——

Miss Shoe. But it says so.

Mr Durrows. Oh, no, I think there must be some mistake about his eating the blood, and that, I mean. Oh, no—I can't think he does that. That's an exaggeration——

Miss Shoe. But I read about it, distinctly.

Mr Durrows. Oh, no—it may have said so—but you may take it from me that he doesn't do that. . . . I was speaking to a man—a well-known lawyer—to-day, and he said that was impossible. And he's a well-known lawyer. . . .

Mrs Bebb. Yes, but you know, that was in Paris, and I don't think

in England you get those sort of people. I don't think you'd find people like that over here, would you?

Miss Shoe. Oh, I don't know—and, you know, it said that after that last one, he disappeared and hasn't been seen or heard of since. And I know it's believed that he's come to London!

Miss Cheezle. Is this the man that kills and eats the women you're talking about? [*Produces bag of lozenges.*

Miss Shoe. Yes, but——

Miss Cheezle [*with dismal gusto*]. A dreadful villain—oh, a shocking villain. I don't know what——

Miss Shoe. Yes, but Mr Durrows says he thinks it must be a mistake about his eating them.

Miss Cheezle. Oh, no; oh, no. [*With conviction*] I haven't the slightest doubt it's true, every word of it. Not the slightest. There's nothing a man like that wouldn't do.

Miss Shoe. Well, this man is a lawyer, and——

Miss Cheezle. Oh, you needn't talk to me, because I'm certain of it. It stands to reason; why, it's obvious a man like that would do anything. [*Puts lozenges in her mouth.*

Miss Shoe. And they say now, dear, he's in London. [*Slight pause.*] Some of the papers say he's over here, at any rate. [*Glancing round apprehensively*] I'm sure I don't like the idea at all. For girls like me who are all alone in the world, and no home, you know, it's not a very nice thought.

Mr Durrows. Well, near my home at Yeovil, when I was a child—a boy, you know, a boy—there was a man—well [*gradually diminuendo*] it was reported—he used to treat the women on his farm very badly—indeed I'm not sure that he didn't beat them occasionally.

Miss Cheezle. What did you say? That he didn't——

Mr Durrows. Beat them occa——

Miss Cheezle. Eat them? Indeed! A shocking villain. . . .

Mr Durrows. Beat them—beat them, I said. No, I never heard of his eating them. Of course, I don't know. It was only a report, and then he may have been drunk at the time. I know they said he drank, though I never saw him myself—but I'm told—I'm told—he used to frequent public-houses and places of that sort, but I never saw him, because I never go near them. . . . I can't stand drink myself of any sort—never could touch it. I don't like it, I don't know why. Often and often I've been asked if I wouldn't, and I don't know how it is, but somehow, it always seems to me——

Miss Shoe [*trying to break a rising embarrassment among the company*]. What do you imagine a man like this person would do, supposing he did come to London? I mean, where would he stay, and that sort of thing? Do you think he would frequent the fashionable parts at all?

Miss Cheezle. I should think it's most probable. In my experienc people like that are often drawn from the best families in the land.

Miss Shoe [*shivering*]. Dear me, not a very pleasant thought, is it

Miss Cheezle [*with lugubrious point*]. Oh, I don't think any of u need worry!

Mr Durrows [*solemnly*]. Well, I'm not at all sure. There hav been cases, I'm told, where *old* women have been attacked. . . .

Miss Cheezle. Eh? [*Slight pause*

Miss Shoe [*suddenly, with embarrassment*]. Well, my dear, to tell yo the truth this is only a ruse on my part. It's entirely a ruse to mak an opening, that's all it is. Because, do you know the paper said—I forget which one it was—anyhow it said that this man had a mole jus under his left eye. Did you see that? Yes, a mole under the lef eye. . . . [*To* Mrs Bebb] Have you looked at Mr Dermott? [*To* Mr Durrows] Have you observed him? He has a mole in the very place And in addition——

Mr Durrows. Indeed, I haven't really——

Miss Shoe. Yes, in the very place. And in addition, do you know I saw his luggage, and it has a Paris label on it——

Mrs Bebb. Oh, yes, didn't you know that? They've come straigh from Paris. I knew that the first night——

Miss Shoe. Well, dear, now that's a proof, isn't it? . . . Well, I mean to say . . . However, in addition, did you *notice* the luggage Did you? Among it was a large *trunk*. Yes. I mean it! An enormous trunk.

Mrs Bebb. Well, but what about that?

Miss Shoe. Well, I mean, dear, if you don't realize . . . However that is not all. Finally, the date that this man disappeared from Paris was April 25th, St Barnabas's Day—St Barnabas, the elder, that is not the one that went to Capri, his is the 17th of September—April 25th. Now do you know what day the Dermotts arrived here? Do you remember? Well, it was exactly April the 27th. Now, how long does it take to come from Paris? A week, I agree, one would have said—a hundred years ago. That's a hundred years ago. That would have been proof against; not proof for, but proof against—in fact overwhelming proof against. That would have decided a court of law against, in spite of the other proofs in favour—the other way, don't you see? But nowadays it doesn't take more than two days at the outside.

[*Enter an enormously stout woman,* Mrs Beam, *dressed in rusty black; she advances to a tall plant standing in a pot in the window and lifts it up preparatory to bearing it away.*

Mrs Bebb. But I thought Mrs Dermott's the daughter of a French viscount, or something. Didn't she say, Mrs Beam——

MRS BEAM. Well, daughter of French viscount or not, I wish she'd never come into my house. [*Standing with the palm waving in the air*] There's three cigarette-ends I've picked up on this floor after Mrs Dermott to-day, and what d'you think, this afternoon she goes and hangs a pair of—well, I'd better not say what—right out of the window to dry them. The way that girl smokes in places she oughtn't and hangs her clothes out of the window is fit to destroy the good name of any house. I suppose it's the way in the foreign parts where she comes from. Perhaps she doesn't know any better and may be a harmless enough creature in her way. But I wish she wasn't in my house.

[*She disappears with the palm.*

MRS BEBB. Of course, a French viscount. That's not much to go by! No one knows what or who he may be.

MISS SHOE [*eagerly*]. Oh, yes, dear, we do, I hope. Viscount Beeks. She's the daughter, it appears, of Viscount Beeks, and that's very interesting, because I remember reading about him in a book. A very well-known French family, to the best of my recollection, an old Huguenot family, and I remember distinctly reading about him in a book.

MRS BEBB. But don't you think, Miss Shoe, in any case, isn't it, don't you think, rather curious that, supposing it as you suggest, the man should have a wife?

JAMES. Better look in his room—see if you can find a knife and fork.

MISS SHOE. Well, my answer to that is, my answer to that—Mrs Bebb, do you think James can be trusted?

MRS BEBB. I don't know, Miss Shoe, I'm sure.

MISS SHOE [*turning to* JAMES, *who pays no attention and has his bent back turned to her*]. James! James, d'you think we can trust you? You'll understand, dear boy, won't you, that you mustn't repeat any of the things we're speaking about anywhere else? You understand, don't you, dear boy? These are really serious matters, about which you may understand more one day.

JAMES [*more interested in his gramophone*]. All right, fire ahead. I know what you're going to say.

MISS SHOE. Oh, no, dear boy, I'm quite sure you don't. [*Turning back*] Well, my answer to that is: how . . . how d'you know she is his wife?

JAMES [*in a careless, low voice, during horrified pause*]. There. I said I knew. I wish I'd got you to bet.

MR DURROWS [*dreamily*]. Oh, well, of course, if you really go as far as that . . .

MISS SHOE. Of course I hardly like to say it, but it must be faced. I therefore say courageously, I therefore say courageously, how do you know that she is? Well, one hardly likes to contemplate it, of course,

but one never knows, you know. And, in addition, you know, with these women this man did that, I mean—well, was just as it might these two *before* he committed the crime. Well, and if that's so, dor you see the danger? Why, any day we may find in his room, dor you see—we may find . . .

MR DURROWS. Yes, indeed, most unpleasant—certainly.

JAMES. Yes, and a knife and fork along with it.

MISS SHOE. Yes, and moreover, *thereafter*, don't you see, thereafte any of us may become the next victim, my dear, you or I, or anyone once free again, having disposed of this girl, this man might atta anyone—Miss Cheezle or Mrs Stone or myself.

MISS CHEEZLE [*in an injured tone*]. Oh, I don't suppose he'd find r very attractive. . . .

JAMES. Well, I don't think so. If I did a thing like that, I wouldr come down here after it, and ask for another helping. I'd fade awa

MISS SHOE. But one thing is quite clear. Since she is the daugh of Viscount Beeks she cannot be in the ordinary sense [*lowering voice*] an unfortunate! And that makes it all the more mysterious.

MISS CHEEZLE [*hard of hearing*]. Cannot be . . . what?

MISS SHOE. Not an unfortunate, dear.

MISS CHEEZLE [*obstinate*]. Oh! Not an unfortunate . . .?

MISS SHOE. No, dear, *not* an unfortunate.

MISS CHEEZLE. How, not unfortunate?

MISS SHOE. Dear, I mean not unfortunate—or rather, *not not* u fortunate, but not *an* unfortunate.

MISS CHEEZLE [*with gloomy innocence*]. Oh, and what's that?

MISS SHOE. An unfortunate, dear—a——

MISS CHEEZLE. Well, I certainly wouldn't have called her ve fortunate with a man like that.

MISS SHOE. No, dear, what I mean is—— Sh! . . .

[*Enter* MR DERMOTT *with an evening paper in his hand. He a well-set-up man of about forty. Sudden pause.* MI SHOE *suddenly finds herself seized with apprehension.*

MR DERMOTT. Has anyone seen my wife anywhere?

[*He crosses to fireplace and stands with his back to*

JAMES. I saw her go out with Langford.

MR DERMOTT. Oh. . . . I see it's confirmed in to-night's paper tha this man that kills the women is somewhere in London.

[*Hands paper to* DURROW

MISS CHEEZLE [*meaningly*]. Indeed. It's not a nice idea, is it?

MR DERMOTT [*affably*]. I beg your pardon.

MISS CHEEZLE [*looking hard at* MR DERMOTT]. I say, it's not a ver pleasant idea that he may be somewhere near. . . .

MR DERMOTT. Oh, I don't know. My wife's father, Viscount Bi

as met him. Says he's quite a nice man to meet. . . . And, after all, what's he done? You'd hardly call it villainy, would you?

MRS BEBB. Not villainy? Well, what would you call it, then?

MISS SHOE. Mr Dermott merely means, I imagine, that——

MR DERMOTT. I should call it—let us say—misfortune. The man himself's a victim as much as anyone else.

MRS BEBB. Indeed? . . . Oh, he's just a victim, along with all the people he kills. Well, I can't say I'm exactly sorry for him.

MR DERMOTT. No, but you should be. Put yourself in his place, for instance——

MRS BEBB. You mean I've got merely to assume I've killed about a thousand women? That's all I've——

MISS SHOE. Oh, no, my dear, not a thousand. Reports vary, but none are above fifty-three, and thirty-nine seems the most likely number. Let us be just—even to a criminal. We must be just!

MRS BEBB. Well, you mean, let us suppose I've killed about forty or fifty women, one more or less doesn't matter?

JAMES [*working hard at the inside of his gramophone*]. And eaten them with a knife and fork.

MISS SHOE [*turning sharply to him*]. There's no evidence for that, dear. None. Mr Durrows's friend, who is a lawyer, says so.

MR DURROWS. Oh, but I think myself he's more than unfortunate, surely. You know, I mean . . I should rather have said criminal. Of course, one must make allowances.

MR DERMOTT. Well, all criminals are unfortunate for that matter.

MRS BEBB. Indeed! Well, I must say that to me that sounds a curious idea certainly. And would you say, for instance, Mr Dermott, that all unfortunate people are criminals?

MR DERMOTT. Not in the least. But consider. A criminal does things because he must, like the rest of us. If he needn't, he wouldn't do them, because he knows the consequences as well as you do. They——

MRS BEBB [*with finality*]. Well, I think he should be flayed alive. Flayed alive, that's what I'd do. Indeed that'd be much too good for him.

[*The door has opened, and* MISS NEWMAN *puts her head round, giggling.* MRS STONE *is behind her also giggling, unseen.*

MISS NEWMAN. Mr Dermott!

MR DERMOTT. Yes?

MISS NEWMAN. Will you come here a minute? Dolly has something for you! [*A burst of giggles.*

MR DERMOTT. Oh! what is it? [*Going towards the door, smiling*] Well, I pity the poor chap if he falls into Mrs Bebb's hands.

[*Exit* MR DERMOTT.

MISS SHOE. My dear, surely that wasn't wise.

MRS BEBB. What wasn't?

MISS SHOE. Well, I mean, showing so much enmity towards th man.

MRS BEBB. And why not, if I feel it! Flayed alive, that's what h ought to be, and too good for him too.

MISS SHOE. Yes, dear, but one needn't tell him so to his face.

MRS BEBB. How d'you know it's his face?

MISS SHOE. It may be his face, dear, it may quite well be his fac I've given you quite sufficient evidence to prove that. And I thin it's hardly wise in the circumstances.

MISS CHEEZLE. To my mind there's no doubt at all. Look at th way he defended himself just now. Said it wasn't his fault, if yo please! And another thing—didn't I say these criminals are generall drawn from the best families in the land, and here we find that this gi is the daughter of a viscount! A nice thing when one can't live quiet in a house without meeting characters like that.

MRS BEBB. Well, I don't care if it is him. I'd tell him what I thi of him all the same. H'm! Nice thing if it was. A man who murdered about a thousand women——

MISS SHOE. My dear, not a thousand. We must be accurat Thirty-nine is the most likely——

MRS BEBB. Well, thirty-nine women—a man who's murdered fort or fifty women standing in a drawing-room full of them and tellin them about it!

MISS SHOE. Yes, dear, but you mustn't exaggerate. You did it jus now, and it's most unwise in these matters. Besides, it's not fair t the man himself.

MRS BEBB. What—with a man who's killed about a hundred women And d'you think I want to be fair to him?

MISS SHOE. My dear, one must be just.

MRS BEBB. Not to a man like that.

MISS SHOE. Oh, yes, dear, to every one.

MRS BEBB. Well, I wouldn't—not to a man like that.

MR DURROWS [*who has been looking at the paper*]. Ha! [*They bot look at him.*] They report here—as though it was a funny thing, a though it was a funny thing, that's the point—that a crocus has bee seen at Kew. Now, in my part of the world——

MISS SHOE. Yes, Mr Durrows, but don't you think that what we'r talking about is rather more important than that?

MR DURROWS [*quickly collecting himself and adjusting his spectacles*] Yes; well, as a matter of fact, I was just wondering what to do about it

MRS BEBB. But you don't mean to say you really think this is th man?

MISS SHOE. And why not, dear? According to the rules——

MRS BEBB. Well, I can't think that there's a man in this house that's killed a multitude of women.

MISS SHOE. And why not? He must be somewhere, and according to——

MRS BEBB. Well, I just feel it in my bones that there isn't.

MISS SHOE. He must be somewhere, and according to the rules of evidence he's here.

MRS BEBB. Well, as I say, I just feel it in my bones he isn't.

[*She rises.*

MISS SHOE. Well, dear, I'm afraid you don't understand the rules of evidence. Now let me recapitulate, let me recapitulate. One of the papers says that this man has a mole—— [JAMES *recommences a terrific record, drowning everything. It continues for a little, and then* JAMES *takes up the sound-box for a moment, to examine the needle, and* MISS SHOE'S *voice is heard.*] . . . Now the date that this man disappeared from Paris was April 25th. St Barnabas's Day—St Barnabas the elder. The day the Dermotts——

[JAMES *puts the sound-box down again and the gramophone goes on with a shriek.* MR DERMOTT, MRS STONE, *and* MISS NEWMAN *come in. An immense gong rings out, vying with the gramophone. In the midst of the din—*

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY

## SCENE 2

*The next day,* 11.30 *in the morning. The* DERMOTTS' *room. There is a window in the back wall, giving over roofs, with spires in the distance. The room is extremely untidy.* LAURA PASQUALE *lies on a sofa close under the window, reading a letter, with her feet resting on the end of the sofa. She is exquisitely graceful, and beautifully dressed.*

DERMOTT *sits at a table near the foreground, with papers in front of him. A promiment object in one corner of the room is a large trunk.*

DERMOTT [*presently, emphatically and slowly, but meditatively, tipping back his chair*]. Yes . . . you see, the problem really is—how to be removed—how to *be* removed, not how to remove ourselves, but how to be removed—from this beautiful boarding-house. How to be removed, as it were, against one's will. Because, if one is removed against one's will, one presumably didn't want to be removed. And if one didn't want to be removed, one couldn't have had reason to want to go. Eh, Laura?

LAURA [*after a moment, speaking with a slightly foreign and distinctive intonation*]. Jonah, I've got a letter from Francis here.

DERMOTT [*still meditatively*]. Now, I should think with you here, Laura, it wouldn't be hard to get oneself removed. With you here . . .

LAURA [*impatient*]. Jonah, I've got a letter from Francis. He says he thinks he'll die since he can't see me now.

DERMOTT [*looking among his papers on the table*]. Oh, I know. But what else does he say?

[LAURA *does not reply at once, lying languidly where she is.*

LAURA [*languidly*]. There are seven—well, eight, including the first one, but that wouldn't count, would it? . . . There are seven "darlings" in the letter, as well as the one at the beginning. . . . You know, Jonah, a lot of people have called me a darling, and really I was thinking just now, I am rather one. [*She turns towards him, smiling and stretching her arms.*] Don't you think so, Jonah? . . . Jonah, aren't I?

DERMOTT [*after a moment*]. What's wrong with you this morning, Laura? Eaten too much? [*Rises and strolls down left.*

[LAURA *gets up on to the back of the sofa and leans far out of the window, and there is a long pause. Then* LAURA *stretches herself again and looks at* DERMOTT.

LAURA. The baby hasn't come out yet . . . Jonah, my baby—the baby that lives opposite.

DERMOTT [*meditatively*]. You know, most people would call you one of the worst varieties of social parasite—and yet really you're no worse than all those dear old idiots downstairs. [*Goes back to his chair and sits.*] . . . Why should you be called a dreadful woman while they're looked on as all right?

LAURA. I'm not a dreadful woman.

DERMOTT. Oh, my dear Laura, you're a dreadful woman, an awful woman, a frightful woman, a dreg, a weed, a parasite, and a whole lot more words like that. Why, you're not even married to me! You're not fit to associate with pure angels like Miss Shoe and Mr Durrows. It's a scandal that you should. I shall denounce you, you foul woman! Denounce you to them!

LAURA. Me? . . . And what about you?

DERMOTT. Me? . . . Oh, I'm a man. That's different.

LAURA. Well, all that'll happen is they'll kick us out. That's all.

DERMOTT. Exactly! Just what they've intended to do. That pleases me, that stroke. . . . I was just sitting here, wondering about the best method of departure, to avoid vulgar curiosity, when my eye fell upon you, Laura. And in a moment I saw it all! A method to get ourselves removed effectively, and provide you with a part simply made to display your brilliant talents.

LAURA [*turning to him*]. Are we going, then?

DERMOTT [*turning to his papers and beginning to write*]. Yes. I tell

you you're going to set foot on your native heath in Brazil, all among the pyjama-trees inside six weeks, Laura. It is there the pyjama-trees grow, isn't it?

LAURA. Oh, Joe! So soon as that, are we going? Almost at once.

DERMOTT [*still writing, in a mock offhand manner*]. Well, Laura, I don't want—er—to disturb any business you may have on hand, any shopping you want to do, or letters to Francis or others you want to write, or worry you with sordid details, not worthy of your romantic spirit. [*Looking up*] But I must remind you that we're *thieves*—a fact you seem inclined to forget—and the police of three countries, including this one, are looking for us . . . and for the—er—valuable objects in that harmless-looking trunk over there. . . .

LAURA. Oh, Joe! And just as I was beginning to like this place, and sitting here by the window and looking out over everything. . . . And I was going to go to church in all the churches with spires I could see, and I'd already made up my mind as to what sort of people I'd see from the shape of the spire; and I was going to go and sit under those trees I can see away over [*pointing*] far away on the skyline—must be right away out of the town on the hills.

DERMOTT [*busy at the table*]. Well, you can sit under the pyjama-trees instead, that grow in Brazil.

LAURA [*sitting on back of sofa*]. Oh, and I was getting on so well with my little baby on the balcony opposite. I was going to get off with him the next time I met him out in his pram. . . . I haven't seen him this morning. I wish the sun would come out, then he'd come too. I wish I could reach over there and touch him. . . .

DERMOTT [*suddenly*]. Laura!

LAURA [*turning quickly*]. Yes, Jonah!

DERMOTT [*going on with his work quietly*]. You talk like a second-rate melodrama. . . . [*Pause.*] Now, what on earth am I to do with you on these forms? Why the devil does one have to fill up forms in order to move about in the earth? I suppose the earth'll have to have a passport to move round the sun one of these days. Who was your father?

LAURA. How do I know, Jonah?

DERMOTT. Laura! But you *must* know who your father was.

LAURA [*innocently*]. No, I don't. How could I tell who he was? You've been pretending lately his name was Bix.

DERMOTT. Ah, yes—dear old Bix. But then he was a creature of my brilliant imagination—to impress people with; sounds so well, doesn't it—the daughter of a viscount! Yes. . . . I'm quite fond of old Bix; and he's got us out of lots of scrapes, hasn't he, Laura? But I'm afraid he's no good for this. No. We'll have to leave him behind in Europe, Laura; you must say farewell to the old Viscount. . . .

[*Examining his pen*] D'you know, I overheard a woman in Paris the other day say that you were a typical product of the dregs of European society that one finds in the Argentine. . . .

LAURA [*dreamily, looking out*]. Did you? You seem very keen on that idea this morning. D'you think I am?

DERMOTT. No, you're not a bit like they really are. But you bear a marvellous resemblance to what they're supposed to be like in Europe, and that does much better. That's why you're such a success.

[*He goes on writing.*

LAURA [*dreamily*]. Am I a success, Joe? I thought it was only you that were a success. . . . By the way, I want a new tube of toothpaste, and I'll get you one at the same time. . . . I wonder how many tubes it takes to make a lifetime. Whenever I see my tube done, I always feel that much older. . . . I suppose, though, when you really get old you stop growing according to that, because you don't have any teeth. . . . You don't have any teeth when you're really old, do you, Joe?

DERMOTT. Look here, Laura, seriously—seriously. I've got to fill up this damned form. Now, what sort of a father shall we give you? . . I think myself he was a cross between a Trinidad pickler and a negro. [LAURA *comes from the window and stands by* DERMOTT.] Or else he was a Peruvian Wollapong with a squint. However—[*suddenly, as though struck by an idea*]—I think Peruvian sounds well. Don't you, Laura? [*He leans back in his chair and looks at her.* LAURA *turns away and stands with her back to* DERMOTT.] Yes—I think we'll say "Peruvian." [*He writes.*] "Peruvian." That's one thing settled. Well, now, having finished with your Peruvian father, let's get on. "Occupation, if any"—oh, that's easy—dead easy. . . . Well, that reminds me. [LAURA *sits on the table and, leaning forward, languorously puts her arms round his neck, and looks into his face.*] The point now is for us so to act as to let this respectable boarding establishment know that we're, so to speak, that, in fact, they brought two hornets into the nest, and——

LAURA. Jonah, why aren't you ever serious?

DERMOTT. I am serious.

LAURA. Not with me. I've never known you serious with me.

DERMOTT. But I am—most solemn. They must be made to understand that we are living together in—well, I won't say what, because it might shock you. I needn't tell them that you belong to the traditional dregs of Peruvian society; they can see that by the cut of your clothes. You didn't know, did you, that it is the distinguishing mark of the dregs of European society that are supposed in Paris to inhabit the Argentine, that they know how to have their clothes cut—of weeds and outcasts, and moral outsiders——

[*She kneels.*

LAURA. No, Joe, you're never serious with me.

DERMOTT. Yes, I am. I'm serious as hell this time. I'm seriously chattering as hard as I can, working hard to make talk, because I see it in your eyes, Laura, in that profound green eye of yours, that the minute I stop—[LAURA *getting nearer*]—you're going in to have a relapse into the sentimentals, and talk like the third act of a second-rate melodrama. Yes, you are! You know you are! Don't say you're not.

LAURA [*breaking away and throwing herself into a sitting position on the floor*]. But suppose I object to your telling them?

DERMOTT. I shan't tell them. They'll know right enough without my telling them. Do you think a nest of angels, of pure innocent beings doesn't know when a foul dragon-fly, a hideous wasp, a moral leper, comes among them? A hideous monster, an ugly toad——

LAURA. Joe, you're a silly ass. I'm sure I'm a lot nicer than Mrs Bebb.

DERMOTT. Oh, worldly woman, you think only of the flesh!

LAURA. I don't see how they'll know.

DERMOTT [*solemnly*]. Laura, if you tried to prevent them knowing it, you couldn't. . . . [*Mockingly once more*] And as for me—well, I am, of course, in any case, deeply infatuated with Mrs Stone. And I shall attempt to lure her to America as my secretary. And so, Laura, we shall be removed, I tell you. They'll pick us up [*making an appropriate movement with his fingers*] and remove us, as one removes the worms out of one of Mrs Beam's salads—and they'll probably, of course, remove some things that they don't expect along with us, inside the trunk! Eh, Laura? So, you see, we'll get what we want —we'll get away—and they'll get what they want and need so badly—a little excitement, and something to do! Think of it, Laura, think of it; I'm sure you haven't the heart to deprive Miss Shoe of it, have you now, when you think what pleasure it will give her! . . . [LAURA *once more kneels beside him.*] Friend, are you not willing to be damned for Miss Shoe's sake?

LAURA [*languorously, putting her arms round him*]. Jonah, why are you never serious with me? . . . You are bitter, aren't you?

DERMOTT [*jumping up, she rising too*]. Ha! Bitter—that's what I am. It's rather fine to be bitter. Yes, bitter! Heroes are always bitter, aren't they? You'd like me better bitter, wouldn't you, Laura? You'd like me bitter better—better bitter.

LAURA [*languorously, approaching him*]. Jonah!

DERMOTT. Nay, touch me not, maiden—Peruvian maiden.

LAURA. Why are you never serious with me, Jonah?

DERMOTT [*changing his tone to one of matter-of-fact seriousness*]. My dear Laura, haven't you yet discovered that there's nothing in this

world that's worth being serious over? . . . Look out there upon that brave array of chimney-pots and London dirt, look out into that bower of Nature, and tell me—tell me, now, whether a world like that is worth being serious over. Sit downstairs at the dinner-table, sit down amid Mrs Beam's collection of freaks, and tell me whether it's possible or profitable to be serious over them.

[*With feeling, sitting on the sofa.* LAURA *sits on table.*

"When the high heart we magnify
And the sure vision celebrate,
And worship greatness passing by,
Ourselves are great."

Not otherwise [*once more mocking*]. And I confess to you, Laura, that I am not moved to magnify the high heart of Mr Durrows, or celebrate the sure vision of Miss Shoe; or even to worship the greatness—[*he makes a gesture of rotundity*]—of Mrs Beam passing by. [*He stretches himself and looks at her.*] Besides, I'm getting old, Laura. I'm an old man really—disillusioned, as they say in the third act of second-rate melodrama, tired of life, waiting for my release; and so on. Bitter! That's it, bitter. Or better, embittered! Whereas, you, Laura, are young, beautiful——

LAURA [*rising from table, coming over and sitting by him, and putting her arms around him*]. Jonah, why won't you tell me what's hurting you all the time?

DERMOTT. Hurting me? Nothing, dear—said he, without conviction.

LAURA. Yes, there is. . . .

DERMOTT. No. What should there be? said he, putting her aside.

[*He puts her aside, gets up, and walks to the window.*

LAURA. There is something. [*Comes right of him.*

DERMOTT. No . . .

LAURA [*following him and putting her arms round his neck*]. Yes, there is. There's something, Joe. What is it? Can't I help?

DERMOTT. No. There's nothing . . . and there's everything. Everything's the same as nothing, didn't you know that? A man that's good for nothing is equal to everything—that's me. . . .

LAURA. Jonah, there is something. Tell me. . . .

DERMOTT [*firmly*]. I tell you there is nothing. I have not the slightest hesitation in telling you that, because I know you won't believe it. If I thought you'd believe it, I wouldn't tell you, because once you thought I hadn't some interesting hidden trouble, you'd lose interest in me and go away. . . . You see, you're not a real living person, Laura—I really assure you, you're not. You're such a perfect natural actress that you don't know when you're acting and when you're not.

. . . Don't you see? So nothing'll do you, but I must be elevated into an interesting hero with the deep sorrow that'll be put right before the evening's out.

LAURA. No, Jonah, I don't believe it.

DERMOTT [*taking her by the hair, then right arm round her neck*]. No, of course you don't. I said you wouldn't, or I would have told you. One ought never to give away the secret of one's power, and yet I don't mind telling you that that's the secret of my power over you. It's a strange thing that I can stand here and tell you in plain language the secret of my power over you without the slightest apprehension as to the result, but so it is. The secret of my power over you is that you don't quite understand me. You never know what I'm going to do. You're not sure of me. You're not even sure of my feelings for you. [*She puts her arms round his neck.*] And so as long as I can keep that going I'm quite certain of you.

LAURA [*affectionately*]. Oh, wise Jonah! But you're completely wrong. I believe in you more than in anything else in the world. . . . You don't realize that you were the first person in the world who was kind to me. That's why——

DERMOTT [*breaking away, holding his ears*]. Oh, Laura—Laura! . . . For God's sake, remember. This is Saturday morning in Notting Hill Gate! I shall order Miss Shoe in here if you don't shut up. . . . [*Falling into a sort of mock lecture*] Besides, you mustn't talk like that about me when I'm here. You can talk like that when I'm dead, and not likely to be seen again. Nothing that's here is romantic; haven't you discovered that? [LAURA *goes to sofa and sits.*] Look at those churches with the spires you're so keen on. They look all right from here, because they're not here; but if you go to them you'll only find them full of bugs and sweaty people, like everywhere else. Just the same as Notting Hill Gate and Mrs Beam's here. Which of these beauties is a hero, I ask you? Miss Shoe or Mr Durrows? . . . And yet the answer depends totally on the view you take of them.

[*He suddenly notices that* LAURA *is not listening, but has begun to weep, blowing her nose. He stops and shrugs his shoulders elaborately. Pause.*

[*Turning back and surveying her*]

"Tears, idle tears, I know not what they can possibly mean;
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather in the eyes, and flow down on
to the blouse,
In looking at the happy autumn fields,

[*Slight pause. He makes an eloquent gesture towards the window.*

And thinking of the days that are no more."

Laura, Laura dear, consider; this isn't the third act of a second-rate melodrama, or anything like that. This is Mrs Beam's respectable London boarding-house on a Saturday morning. . . . Think, Miss Shoe's in the next room You can't possibly act like this with Miss Shoe in the next room. . . . One can absolutely feel her through the wall. [*Goes to chair.*

LAURA [*rising and facing him, suddenly*]. Oh, why d'you go on pretending! D'you think I don't know that all this talk of yours is pretence? You're jealous, really, that's what you are.

DERMOTT. Hallo, Laura, you're waking up. You've actually said something I didn't expect you to say. D'you know that's the first thing you've said for a long time that I didn't expect you to say? . . . [*He sits down again before his papers.*] I didn't think you'd be such a silly fool.

LAURA. It's no good going on like that. I know you well enough now. You're jealous. You're jealous of young Langford.

DERMOTT [*stopping what he was doing, meditatively*]. Well, now, how curious! It sounds as if you really meant it. . . . But no, it isn't possible. And yet—[*looking blandly at her*]—yes, I do believe it's possible you do actually mean it. Dear me. . . . Dear me. . . . Hum. . . . [*With elaborate indifference he goes on with his work—presently*] Hum!

LAURA [*after a time, helplessly*]. You're jealous. You know you are.

DERMOTT. Hum! Oh, undoubtedly. No, I didn't think you'd be such a silly fool. Because, you see, it's you that's jealous. Ha! Ha! You're jealous because I've dared to look at some one else. [LAURA *goes to sofa, flings herself face downwards on it, gets book, and turns over pages fiercely.*] But, as it happens, it suits me to be infatuated—as I undoubtedly am—with Mrs Stone, and it suits me that you should be infatuated—as you undoubtedly are—with Colin Langford. Because all that will serve to hasten the removing process [*he makes a gesture of picking up worms*] that I was telling you about. And when I go, well, if it's Mrs Stone that is removed, or removes herself with me, while you, dear Laura, remain behind in the arms of your Colin, well . . . And so I say, go on, flirt with him, hang round him, and if you could just manage to kiss him when you think Miss Shoe isn't looking, but she really is! . . .

[*There is a pause.* DERMOTT *goes on with his work.* LAURA *beats a rapid tattoo with her feet on the settee in an ecstasy of rage. Then all of a sudden she turns and throws the book at his head.*

[*Blandly, as* LAURA *pauses after the book*] Dear me, what's wrong? [*Very suddenly stern, ferocious*] What's wrong, I said? [LAURA *involuntarily shrinks.* DERMOTT *goes on with his work. A moment after* LAURA

*suddenly recovers and flings the cushion.*] Ah! I can interpret. I see now. . . . You are referring to my statement that there is no romance here. [LAURA *flings a banana she has seized from a bag.*] And by that, it's quite clear, of course, you mean that there is one—— [*Another banana.*] And by that, of course, that his name is——

LAURA [*jumping up*]. There, I said you were jealous of him. You damned swine!

[*She rushes to settee, flings more bananas, following them with her slippers.*

DERMOTT. Ah, but wait, Laura. Wait! I assure you he's not half so much of a hero now as he will be when you are parted for ever, and thousands of miles of blue ocean . . . [*Two bananas in quick succession. The second hits him.*] Here—this is getting . . .

[*He seizes the bag of buns, and begins a rapid fire of buns back again.* LAURA *is out of ammunition,* DERMOTT *is laughing all the time, but* LAURA *is too angry.*

LAURA [*shouting*]. You think you can play with me, and do what you like with me . . . But I'll show you. . . .

[*In her violence she tears her dress open, and rushing at him seizes him round the throat, shaking him and beating him with her fists. He is too convulsed with laughter to offer great resistance. She overturns the chair on which he is sitting so that they arrive in a heap on the floor with a tremendous thud. Presently, while still laughing, he exerts strength to control her, and getting hold of her wrists he pins her eventually down beneath him, struggling all the time like a Fury.*

DERMOTT [*comparatively serious—when she has grown quiet for a moment*]. Laura, you are extraordinarily attractive to me, even in spite of Mrs Stone. There is really no doubt of it. . . . Do you hear, Laura? You are extraordinarily attractive to me. Do you hear? [*No answer.*] Poor girl, deaf as a post.

[*She lies quite still on the floor, while* DERMOTT, *much ruffled, sits on the floor near her. There is a knock at the door, and almost immediately it is pushed open by* MISS SHOE.

DERMOTT. How do you do!

MISS SHOE. Oh, I beg your pardon. I thought you said "Come in." I was only wondering whether——

DERMOTT [*quite at ease*]. Oh, it's perfectly all right, Miss Shoe—we're delighted to see you. . . . Only, of course, in the circumstance I can't guarantee a graceful position—at least not as regards myself. I don't think it's in Laura to be ungraceful ever. I've never seen her anything but perfect yet. . . . [*He has got up.* LAURA *lies exactly as she was.*] There now, look at that! Could anything be more graceful?

[LAURA *gets up, full of a sort of refined sulkiness, and goes over to th sofa with her back turned.* DERMOTT *laughs.*] And I expect you wer wondering what all the row was about——

MISS SHOE. Oh, no, really, I only came to ask if I might borrow little coal——

DERMOTT. Oh, yes, I'm sure that was all you *came* for—but still, think you must have been wondering about the noise. Well, as matte of fact, Laura was throwing things at me—only most of them hit th wall instead, didn't they, Laura? [*No answer.* LAURA *has lighted cigarette.*] And then she attacked me, and battered me to pieces— Laura's a bad girl, when she's roused—a naughty girl, aren't you Laura? She's a very naughty girl this morning, and she knows it [LAURA *throws a match at him.*] . . . But there's no doubt she's beauti ful and graceful, like most of her race; and, curiously enough, do yo know in that I think she resembles you. . . . I think you must hav been wonderfully like her when you were her age, I do really.

[LAURA *has got up, and come over with the box of cigarett which she offers with a sort of contemptuous venom to* MIS SHOE, *at the same time blowing a cloud of smoke disdainfull right into* MISS SHOE'S *face.* MISS SHOE *refuses tremulously and, with a look of complete contempt at* DERMOTT, LAUR *once more retires.*

[*Looking after* LAURA, *as she retires*] You have the same grace of move ment—the same, I don't know, it's subtle, but it's there all right. [*H smiles at her delightfully.* MISS SHOE *is completely confused.*] Now then, what can we——

MISS SHOE [*suddenly finding her voice*]. Well, you know, I have som Spanish blood in me, and it's supposed to have come out in me and not in my brothers and sisters. We're a great mixture really, on my father's side we come from France originally—the de Burghs, who owned lands near Lyons, titled people they were—but on my mother's side, my mother's grandfather married a Spanish woman—she came I think, from somewhere near Cadiz, so perhaps that's the reason——

LAURA [*turning round*]. Are you suggesting that I'm Spanish?

MISS SHOE. Oh, no! Of course not. How stupid of me! Why your father is Viscount Beeks——

LAURA [*staring at her*]. Well, supposing I told you that——

DERMOTT. Laura! Laura! Where are your manners this morning dear? [LAURA *retires to trunk right.*] She's a naughty girl this morn ing, Miss Shoe; you must really excuse her. Now, what can I do for you? Anything you like. Command me—oh, of course, it's about this coal. [*Goes and gets scuttle*

MISS SHOE. Well, indeed, all I really wanted was a little coal, if I might borrow a little and pay you back later. You see, it's a long way

up for the servants. As a matter of fact the weather was cold yesterday and I burnt my fire practically all the time. I had had a letter from my brother in America. . . . Oh, you're very good. . . .

DERMOTT. Shall I bring it along? Perhaps if——

MISS SHOE. Oh, thank you. . . . He's the youngest, and he's been rather spoilt. Well, eventually, he went into the asbestos trade. Well, you see, he's been travelling round, and I haven't heard much about him. But it so happens—oh, thank you, if you will—it so happens, now this is a funny thing—that he's come across an adopted son of mine—I have adopted children, you know—oh, quite lots. . . .

[*They have gone out.* DERMOTT, *carrying the coals, and she has become inaudible. There is a pause.* MISS SHOE'S *voice can be heard faintly, and a few words are distinguishable.*

". . . Broadstairs. . . . Sunday morning it was. . . . Such a nice young fellow. . . . England on business . . . lovely. . . . Parnassus in the State of Maine . . . the first I've really had."

[*Then she becomes more audible.*

"So excited about this, you see, that I was in my room all morning reading it. I read it three times, I always do, so as to get everything accurately in the mind—and then in answering; and I burnt my fire all the time, you see, and that's how I used my coal. I'm sure very much obliged. . . ."

[*There are some inaudible conventionalities, her door shuts, and a moment later* DERMOTT *returns. Meanwhile* LAURA, *after standing sulkily for some time, has finally retreated to a peculiar seat on the floor, under a round table leaning against its solitary central leg.*

DERMOTT. Laura!

[*No answer.* DERMOTT *goes over to the table to get a cigarette. Just as he arrives* LAURA *pushes backwards and upwards with her head and upsets the whole table with its numerous contents on to the floor.*

[*Picking a cigarette from among the débris on the floor*] Well, it's all one to me where I get it from. [*He lights it. After a moment*] Well, I never! Fancy being jealous of Miss Shoe.

LAURA [*picking herself up*]. I'm not jealous of her.

DERMOTT. Oh, yes, you are! I see you are. . . . But you're rather like her all the same. The same grace of movement. . . .

[*He titters.* LAURA *looks very black.*

LAURA [*with assumed lightness*]. Do you know what I'm going to do?

DERMOTT. No, Laura darling, what?

LAURA. I'm going to tell them about you, show you up.

DERMOTT. Ha! Show us up, you mean? Well, I'm going to do that myself, I told you.

LAURA. No, I don't mean that. I'm going to show *you* up.

DERMOTT. Oh. . . . D'you think I'm frightened?

LAURA. I shall laugh.

DERMOTT [*going up to her and looking her in the face*]. Yes. . . You're the eternal feminine—that must have all men after you and no one else; and you after no one at all. Mr Colin Langford must hang round you, and I must. You've let Mr Durrows off so far. . . . Well, thank you, but this is my show, and here my idea goes and not yours, d'you understand? And I'm going to have you and Mrs Stone and anyone else I choose hanging after me, and I shall treat you all just as I like, without any interference from any one of you. I'm going to teach you a lesson. [*He looks at her, and she back hard at him.*

LAURA. I shall laugh!

DERMOTT. Do you think I'm frightened of anything you can do?

[LAURA *looks black for a moment or two, then suddenly she smacks him hard in the face. In a flash he has seized her wrist. He stands rigid gripping her wrist, and looking hard at her, while she stares back defiant.*

## ACT II

### SCENE I

*The same scene as Act I, Scene I. The same evening, before dinner.* DERMOTT *stands with his back to the mantelpiece*—MRS STONE *languishing at him in a chair. The easy-chair has been moved to the recess, the back to the audience; the footstool is in front of the Chesterfield; the gramophone is below, the piano extreme left, and the table further up stage towards the left side of the fire.*

MRS STONE [*making eyes*]. Yes—I got it.

DERMOTT. What?

MRS STONE. Yes. I got your note.

DERMOTT. Oh, and what do you say? You didn't tell anyone, did you?

MRS STONE [*reproachfully*]. Oh, now! As if I would.

DERMOTT. Well, and what do you say?

MRS STONE. Well . . . do you really mean that you would like me to be your secretary?

DERMOTT [*smiling*]. Yes. Why not?

MRS STONE. Well, I'm sure it's very kind of you. But you see . . .

DERMOTT. Yes?

MRS STONE. Well, you see, my husband . . . he might be upset.

DERMOTT. Oh, but why?

MRS STONE. Well, you see . . . you travel about, don't you? And I should have to go with you [*she giggles*] if I was your—your . . .

DERMOTT. Oh, of course.

MRS STONE. Well, you see, he couldn't have me then, so he might object.

DERMOTT. Oh, but why on earth . . .?

MRS STONE. Well, I don't know. I think he would, you know. He's a——

DERMOTT. Yes, but why? I mean that would be extraordinary, wouldn't it?

MRS STONE. Yes—oh, yes, I suppose it would! [*After a moment*] But then, you see, he's an extraordinary man.

DERMOTT. Well, he must be. I mean, he's very rarely with you now, is he?

MRS STONE. Oh, no.

DERMOTT. What?

MRS STONE [*stammering*]. Oh, no—I mean yes. That is, I mean——

DERMOTT. And he doesn't treat you well, now, does he?

MRS STONE. No, he doesn't.

DERMOTT. And yet he's supposed to because he's your husband, isn't he?

MRS STONE [*bringing forth a favourite aphorism*]. I don't know. I think perhaps all men are the same. [*She giggles and looks at* DERMOTT.

DERMOTT. Oh, dear, no! Do you think I would be the same?

MRS STONE. I don't know. I dare say. [*Pause.*] But then you're not my husband, you see.

DERMOTT. No, but if I was.

MRS STONE. I don't know. [*She giggles and turns away.*

[*The door opens and* MISS SHOE *comes in.* DERMOTT *looks at her and she stops suddenly.*

MISS SHOE [*hurriedly*]. Oh, it's all right. I only thought I had left my glasses here. [*She withdraws quickly and the door shuts.*

[*Pause.*

DERMOTT [*looking at the closed door inquiringly*]. Well, how d'you know you didn't? [*He turns round and examines the mantelpiece.*] As a matter of fact you did.

[*He produces the spectacles and smiles at* MRS STONE, *whose face is a reflex of his. Then he puts them on and looks at her comically.*

MRS STONE [*giggling*]. Oh, you are silly. [*She cannot stop laughing.*

DERMOTT [*changing his tone of voice, thus abolishing* MRS STONE'S *giggling on the instant*]. Yes, but then I'm not your husband, you see, and mine is purely a business proposal. And yet I dare say you'd find I'd treat you better if you were my secretary than he does as your husband. Don't you think I would?

MRS STONE. Yes—oh, yes. I expect so.

DERMOTT. Well, now. I'm sure you're full of energy and enterprise and initiative. Don't you think so?

MRS STONE. Yes—oh, I dare say, yes.

DERMOTT. I mean, if you take a thing up, you put your whole heart into it, don't you?

MRS STONE. Yes—oh, yes. I expect so.

DERMOTT [*with great energy*]. Well, now, you see, that's what I want. I want some one of *resource*, that I can trust to leave things to. Do you see what I mean?

MRS STONE. Oh, yes.

DERMOTT. Can you write shorthand, or type, or anything like that?

MRS STONE. Well, I did take it up once, only I—I gave it up. I didn't like it. I didn't get on very well.

DERMOTT. Oh, well, that's all right. I mean I'm sure you could get that up again, if you had some reason. Don't you think so?

MRS STONE. Oh, yes, I expect so.

DERMOTT [*fiercely almost*]. I mean it's only a question of *will*. If one has only the *will*, one can do *anything* in this world. Don't you think so? [*Glaring at* MRS STONE.

MRS STONE [*feebly*]. Yes. I should think——

DERMOTT. And then you want to see the world, don't you? I mean you told me so yourself—about your wanting to go to America. And you want to *do* something, don't you? You said so. And quite right too: I mean you're not the kind of woman to be idle. You want to *do* something, to be *at* something, using your *energy* and *character* on it! Well, here's a chance, don't you see?

MRS STONE. Yes—oh, yes—I . . .

DERMOTT. Of course I mean I haven't said anything yet. All this is indefinite. But supposing you got an offer of secretarial work, would you take it? [*Pause.*] I take it you would.

MRS STONE. Yes—oh, yes.

DERMOTT. You would?

MRS STONE [*stammering*]. Yes. Yes, I would.

DERMOTT. And what about your husband?

MRS STONE [*completely vague*]. I don't know.

DERMOTT. Do you think you would be good at it?

MRS STONE [*coquettishly*]. I don't know.

DERMOTT [*in a very matter-of-fact manner*]. I think you would. That's why I want you. I want some one of *energy* and *drive*. Do you think you would have any interest in it?

MRS STONE. Yes—oh, yes.

DERMOTT [*smiling*]. But I expect you'd need careful handling—I think there's a lot in the way you handle a person, isn't there?

MRS STONE. Yes, I expect so.

DERMOTT. Well, now, supposing I make this offer definite, will you let me know what you think?

MRS STONE. Yes—oh, yes, certainly. [*Pause.*

DERMOTT. Of course there's the question of terms, and remuneration, and so on. I haven't said anything about that yet, have I?

MRS STONE. No.

DERMOTT. Well, now, what would you be willing to come for?

MRS STONE [*vaguely*]. I don't know. You see I——

DERMOTT. Yes?

MRS STONE [*rising, much agitated*]. I say, come over here in the corner, and then we shan't be seen. . . .

[*She puts her arm on his in a confidential way.*

DERMOTT. Shan't be seen?

MRS STONE [*vulgarly coquettish*]. Yes, come on.

[*They go over to the recess. As they approach* LAURA *rises out of the chair with its back turned, and steps out with a face black as night. She walks straight past them and goes over to the fire with her back to them.*

DERMOTT. Hallo, darling! I didn't know you were there. I was just . . .

[*He breaks off with a laugh as she has passed him, and looks after her.* MRS STONE *is frightfully embarrassed. Slight pause. A commotion becomes evident at the door, caused by* JAMES BEBB'S *insisting that he will enter against* MISS SHOE, *who has been trying to persuade him not to. The door suddenly at this point flies open, revealing him and her expostulating in the doorway. The door open, she is forced by the embarrassment of the situation to enter.* MRS STONE *seizes the opportunity to escape. Enter* JAMES, MISS SHOE, *and* COLIN.

[*Quite at ease*] Oh, Miss Shoe, your glasses were here all the time. Here they are.

[*He hands them to her with a kind of humorous gallantry.*

MISS SHOE [*in great confusion*]. Oh, thank you.

[MISS SHOE *turns to go out.*

DERMOTT [*increasing* MISS SHOE'S *embarrassment by insisting on talking to her and going out with her*]. It's very awkward when one loses things,

isn't it? I know I was saying to Mrs Stone when you came in just now . . . [*They have gone.*

COLIN [*coming centre*]. Oh, there you are, Laura. I've been looking for you. I was wondering where you were.

[JAMES *rushes by him, so as to get easy-chair left of fire first, thus compelling* COLIN *to go to sofa.* LAURA *stands by the fire, as if thinking hard. Suddenly she turns to* JAMES *and* COLIN.

LAURA [*giving her attention pointedly to* JAMES *and perching herself on the arm of the chair*]. Hallo, James, hallo! How are you? [*She attempts to take his arm.*

JAMES [*roughly but not unkindly*]. Oh, get away. I'll twist your arm for you in a minute.

LAURA [*delighted*]. Oh, James, will you? Oh, do! [*She holds out her arm.*] There, James, there it is—twist it! Do!

[JAMES *seizes it and makes a ferocious gesture—really quite harmless.* COLIN *has sat down, and looks on discontented.*

JAMES [*settling himself and opening his motor paper, while* LAURA *attempts to perch on his knee*]. There now, that'll do! Get away!

LAURA [*suddenly jumping on to his knee*]. Oh, James!

JAMES. Oh, get away!

LAURA [*looking at him over his motor paper*]. I see you!

JAMES. Oh, shut up! . . .

LAURA. Oh, James, talk to me! [*She tries to pull his paper down.*

JAMES [*angrily*]. Oh, leave it alone! I want to read.

LAURA [*coaxingly, holding out her arm*]. James, twist my arm, James.

JAMES [*with irritated and complaining emphasis*]. Oh, do get away, will you! Can't you see I want to read?

LAURA. Oh, James! [*She ruffles his hair.*

JAMES [*really put out*]. Oh, do stop worrying a chap. I wouldn't worry you if you wanted to read. Go and worry him for a change. [*Indicating* COLIN, *who sits looking disconsolate.*

LAURA. Oh, I daren't. He doesn't want me. He doesn't love me like you do, James.

[*She gets up and goes over to the back of the sofa upon which* COLIN *has sat down.* JAMES *settles himself firmly in the chair with his motor papers.*

LAURA [*putting her arm round* COLIN]. But, he's rather nice, this friend of yours, James. Don't you think he's rather nice? . . . James, don't you think so? . . . James!

JAMES. You know, Langford, I've no use for those Bradshaws. They're too hard to take down. Dud buses, that's what they are. Specially the four-horse. Absolutely dud reputation—the four-horse Bradshaw.

LAURA [*behind* COLIN]. Oh, stop talking about your motors, James, and tell me—don't you think Pepito's rather nice?

[*Leans her face on his head.*

JAMES. Do you know that you're a married woman? You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

LAURA [*straightening herself*]. Do you think I ought, James?

JAMES. Of course you ought. [*Pause.*

LAURA. Aren't there any motors out in the road you want to go and look at, James?

JAMES. You're a married woman and you ought to be ashamed of yourself. [LAURA *perches on back of sofa, and pokes* COLIN, *who turns to her.*] But, by Gad, I do like those Condamine models. The frame's damned whippy, of course, damn whippy, and I don't like the back axle. But otherwise, I'd as soon have one of those tubs as any. Wouldn't you? [*No answer.*

[JAMES *looks across at the others and finds them rather engaged with each other.*

JAMES. No, I'm not going away, so you needn't think I am.

LAURA. What, James?

JAMES. I'm not going away. [*He settles himself down very firmly in his chair.*] I'm going to read an article on hill-climbing and one on friction-drives. And when I've done that I'll probably play the gramophone.

LAURA. I don't want you to go.

JAMES. You're a liar; and Langford does too. He's just dying to kiss you, only he daren't with anyone here.

LAURA. Not at all. Of course he'll kiss me in front of you, won't you, Pep? [COLIN *doesn't move. She puts her arm round him.*] Won't you? . . . Pep?

JAMES. There! I told you. He's in much too much of a funk! Jolly good job too. Married woman like you.

LAURA. Oh, Tony. You are a bad boy, that you won't kiss me in front of gibing James. . . . I do think it's mean. You might, I do think. I don't believe you like me a bit.

JAMES. Perhaps he doesn't. . . . Very natural, married woman like you! You're an absolute old iron—that's what you are. I bet none of your valves work properly. . . .

LAURA [*leaning over settee*]. Tony—what's the matter? You're not angry, are you? [*No answer. There is a pause. Noise of motor begins.*] Well, never mind. I'll kiss you instead—that'll be the best way.

[*She does so, and whispers in his ear.*

JAMES [*presently looking up from his paper*]. Good Lord—and you a—— Hallo! I swear that's one of those new Overstrands with the magnetic clutch!

[*He gets up quickly, and, going over to the window, peers out. After a moment he goes quickly towards the door.*

LAURA. Oh, James, don't go! We do want you!

[*Exit* JAMES, *leaving door open.* LAURA *shuts it after him.*] [*Coming centre*] Oh, he might. I do think he might have stayed, don't you, Pepito? I think he is mean. . . . Isn't he, Pep? Don't you think your friend's mean to go away like that when I asked him so nicely to stay? [*No answer. Pause.*] Pepito—what's wrong? Why don't you answer?

COLIN [*indistinctly*]. Nothing.

LAURA [*coming to settee and sitting left of* COLIN]. What is it? Yes there is. There's something. Tell me. . . . Won't you tell me?

COLIN. You wouldn't want to know if there is.

LAURA. Of course I would. What is it?

[COLIN *gets up and stands in an uncertain way.*

COLIN. There's nothing wrong.

LAURA [*presently*]. Well, why don't you speak?

[COLIN *says nothing, but smiles at* LAURA *in a rather woebegone way.* LAURA *produces a cigarette-case from the settee and a box of matches. She lights a cigarette, striking the match on the sole of her shoe, and throwing the end at, but not into, the fireplace.*

I suppose I shall get in a fearful row for smoking in here.

[*Pause. He stands where he is and she sits quite still.*

[*Presently*] Well, this isn't much fun, is it? Tony, what's the matter? You're not angry, are you?

COLIN. No.

LAURA. What is it, then? [*Rises.*] Tell me! [*She shakes him, then she presses close against him.*] Kiss me. [COLIN *says nothing, but looks hard at her.*] Well, I shall kiss you, then. [*She gets a stool, stands on it, puts her arms round him, and kisses him.*] Tell me. There's something wrong. There's something hurting you, I know there is. Come and sit down. [*He leaves her standing on the footstool and crosses centre.*] This is most awfully uncomfortable for me. There, I'll sit here, and you may sit on the arm, like that, if you're a good boy.

[*She sits down on settee, he on the arm, with his arm round her.*

COLIN. I say, what would Dermott say if he saw us now?

LAURA. He wouldn't care. He doesn't care what I do.

COLIN. Laura, are you fond of him?

LAURA. No, I hate him.

[*While they talk,* COLIN *keeps looking nervously towards the door and starting up occasionally when he hears a step.* LAURA *is perfectly languid.*

COLIN. You don't!

LAURA. Yes, dear, I do!

COLIN. But you can't. You couldn't sit there and say it like that if you did.

LAURA. Why not? [*Throwing her cigarette away and turning on him so suddenly and violently that he is completely dazed*] I hate him, I tell you, loathe him, spit on him! Bah! I hate the ground he walks on. . . . But let's talk about something else.

COLIN [*as soon as he has collected himself after the hurricane*]. No, I want to talk about this. Why did you get married to him if you hate him?

LAURA. I didn't know any better, I suppose. I didn't know him then as he really is. But don't let's talk about it.

COLIN. Why, what is he really? How d'you mean?

LAURA [*after a moment, slowly*]. I suppose men never have to be slaves now. . . . It's only girls. [*Pause.*

COLIN. Yes, but you're not a slave.

LAURA [*leaping up and standing in front of him, again staggering him with her suddenness*]. A slave? [*Pointing to herself*] This thing here, every bit of it, this head, this body, this hand, every one of them are slaves. [*Smiling and walking about*] You wouldn't think so to look at me, Pep. Would you? . . . But it's true. [*She goes back to the settee and kneels beside him. Putting her hand on his arm and looking up at him laughing*] It's all right. . . . Don't look so puzzled! . . . Kiss me! . . . You won't? [*He does so.*] Kiss me again. . . . What, you won't kiss me twice? Not even twice? . . . Oh, Tony!

[*Sits back on her heels.*

COLIN [*rising and coming down centre*]. Oh, Laura, I'm sure some one will come through the door in a minute.

LAURA. Well, and what if they do? . . . I wouldn't mind. [*Rises.*] . . . Only you think you don't look nice from the back when you're kissing a girl. Well, neither you do. But that's only because your whole heart isn't in it. You're thinking of what you're looking like and you're ashamed of yourself. But if you put your whole heart into it, it looks nice from everywhere. All the people watching wish they were you. . . . Now I'll stand, and you come and kiss me, and don't feel silly while you do it, or you'll look silly.

[*She stands alluringly, looking directly at him standing half turned away.*

[COLIN *immediately becomes stiff and embarrassed.*

Well?

[*He still stands a moment, and then approaches her slowly and shamefaced, as if doing something against his will. He feels foolish while kissing her, and can't get the fear of the door opening from his mind, and looks in the last degree awkward.*

Not at all good. . . . I don't think you love me a bit. Now you stand! [*Pushes him right.*

[*He stands embarrassed.*

[*She pirouettes round, full in her element, approaches him ecstatically, and embraces him.*

Now you try!

[*She stands right of him. He approaches her and embraces her with more passion probably than he ever displayed in his life before.*

[*Enter* JAMES *and* MISS SHOE, *who puts a Plasmon biscuit-tin down with a bang. At once* COLIN'S *fear of convention overcomes his feeling for* LAURA, *and he fights awkward but determined to free himself, while she clings to him obstinately.*

JAMES [*annoyed*]. Oh, Lord, wasting your time as usual? I do think it's a bit thick. I say, you must come and see it; it's one with the mag. clutch. I've been talking to the chauffeur.

[COLIN, *glad to hide his embarrassment, goes with* JAMES, *and they disappear.*

MISS SHOE [*sitting down on a chair, and looking at a paper much embarrassed*]. How nice to have the energy of youth!

LAURA [*after a pause*]. Miss Shoe . . . Miss Shoe . . . I . . .

MISS SHOE [*suddenly looking at her*]. Oh . . . yes. . . .

LAURA. I'm afraid I was rude to you this morning, and I want to apologize. I hope you'll forgive me.

MISS SHOE. Oh, not at all. I didn't notice it, really.

LAURA. I didn't mean it, you know, and I was awfully sorry afterwards. Only I'm awfully silly sometimes, and impulses get the better of me. I'm afraid I'm a very naughty girl really——

MISS SHOE. Oh, no, my dear. [*Rises and goes to left of settee.*] I quite see that my entrance at such a moment may have upset you. I'm sure I didn't want to, and wouldn't have, if I could have thought of any other way of saving the servants bringing up the coals. . . .

[*She smiles, and then abruptly looks away.*

LAURA. And I said I wasn't Spanish, and . . .

MISS SHOE. Of course you're not. It was so stupid of me to forget. [*With vivacity*] Of course, dear, you're a daughter of Viscount Beeks aren't you? An old Huguenot family, are they not, the Beeks? You must understand, dear, I've been an admirer of your father for many years. [*Pause.* LAURA *has nothing to say.*] That is one of the reasons I at once was interested in you, dear. Now come and tell me about yourself. [LAURA *sits on a stool.*] Where were you educated?

LAURA. Me?

MISS SHOE. Yes, you, dear.

LAURA. Oh—in a convent in Paraguay.

[*She pronounces it Spanish style.*

MISS SHOE. In Paraguay? [*English style.*] Really? Did your father live in South America, then?

LAURA. Yes.

MISS SHOE. And is he there still?

LAURA [*slightly embarrassed*]. Oh, yes. . . .

MISS SHOE. In Paraguay. Dear me. That must have been immensely interesting—immensely interesting. Let me see, Paraguay is the brown piece, rather a square shape, between the two pink pieces, near the toe, isn't it? [LAURA *looks puzzled.*] That's the way I always think of it, on the map, you know. . . .

LAURA. Oh—I'm afraid I don't remember what the map is like.

MISS SHOE. It's a great grain-growing centre, isn't it, great exports of grain?

LAURA. Not where the convent was. It was all surrounded by houses.

MISS SHOE. Ah, yes, my dear! But that was a town, no doubt, that would be a town. But out in the country, you see. . . .

LAURA. Oh, I never was in the country. They never allowed us to go.

MISS SHOE. Oh, yes, and Paraguay is below the equator, isn't it? So that it's winter there when it's summer here, and *vice versa.* Dear me, how interesting! It must be wonderful over there. I often long to go and see my South African cousins, for, as I said, you know, I have Spanish blood in me. I'm the only one of the family that shows it, you know. All my brothers and sisters are quite English. And I always feel I'd like to go to South America and Spain and places like that. I've never had the opportunity, but I read about them, and I have a nephew who's been in those parts, and he tells me about them, and I hear about them from other friends, so that I can picture them very well now. Very wonderful it must be, with the blue skies and the hot sunlight and all the light dresses. Now where do you know best? Where does your father live?

LAURA. Well, it's near Rio that I've lived mostly; I lived there till I was fifteen, except the time I lived in Boston.

MISS SHOE. Oh, dear me, you've been in Boston too? That's in North America—the United States, you mean. Dear me, you've travelled quite a lot, haven't you? . . . Let me see, Rio? Oh, that's in Brazil, isn't it? Well, now, tell me about it. Is it pleasant there? I think it must be very pleasant.

LAURA. Oh, it's much like other places, I think.

MISS SHOE. Oh, but, my dear, it must, I think, be delightful. I know I used to know a friend many years ago who'd been in Rio, and

she used to tell me about it. The great river with all the shipping on it, miles of wharves, and then farther up the wonderful jungles and forests, through which the river finds its way. Yes, Brazil must be a wonderful country—quite impenetrable in parts, quite impenetrable. Have you ever been in those parts?

LAURA. In——?

MISS SHOE. In the impenetrable parts, you know; where man can penetrate no farther owing to the thickness of the jungle and the feverish character of the swamps?

LAURA. No, I don't think I was ever in those parts.

MISS SHOE [*after a pause*]. And a wonderful people, too—a daring, bold people, those adventurers must have been that sailed away into the West. I always feel a sort of fellow-feeling with them, because I feel that that's just the sort of thing I should have liked to do, had things been otherwise. I suppose it's because I come of many races. I have cosmopolitan blood in me. . . . Have you been in Europe long?

LAURA. No, not very long.

MISS SHOE. You can't have been married very long, dear.

LAURA. Why do you think that?

MISS SHOE. Because I can see you're not very old, dear. I can see that, especially because the Southern races in general age more rapidly than we do—that is so, is it not?

LAURA [*after a moment*]. Yes, I'm not very old really. [*Pause.*

MISS SHOE. Well, now, dear, if you're not very old, perhaps you won't mind my saying something to you, dear? You won't mind my speaking to you about something, will you? Quite kindly, of course, you understand? Quite kindly. [*Pause.*

LAURA. No. . . . [*She looks at* MISS SHOE *and smiles.*

MISS SHOE. You're sure you won't mind?

LAURA. No.

MISS SHOE. Well, dear, it's only this. Do you think your action as regards Mr Langford is quite wise? Now, you're sure you're not angry with me for alluding to it?

LAURA. What action?

MISS SHOE. Well, now, you'll not mind my speaking frankly, dear, and sincerely—well, say what would have happened if some one had come into the room this afternoon when he was making love to you?

LAURA. But what makes you think he was making love to me, Miss Shoe?

MISS SHOE. Well, you see, dear, I've had a considerable experience of life, and I could see at a glance, though, as I say, you probably wouldn't realize that I could, that something like that had been happening. It had, dear, had it not?

LAURA. Yes, I suppose it had. . . .

MISS SHOE. Well, now, dear, do you think it was quite wise? Quite right, I mean, or nice?

LAURA. Well, I don't know. . . . Do you think it wasn't?

MISS SHOE. Well, it stands to reason it wasn't. What, for instance, would your father say? What would Viscount Beeks say? I'm sure he wouldn't approve of that kind of thing.

LAURA. I never thought of that really. . . .

MISS SHOE. And what would your husband say?

LAURA. Oh, he does the same to me, only far worse.

MISS SHOE. The same? Do you mean that he is on intimate terms with other women?

LAURA. Others? Hundreds!

MISS SHOE. Oh, my dear child! And did you know that when you married him?

LAURA. No. You see, I——

MISS SHOE. No, there it is, my dear, that's what I always say. We girls are not lacking in common sense, I'm convinced of that. It isn't that. But we're too trusting. If we see a charming man we trust him and believe in him, and there it is; your husband is a very charming man, there is no doubt of it.

LAURA. Yes, I know. That's just the . . .

MISS SHOE. Well, my dear, now that you've told me, you must treat me as a friend in the matter, as, say, an elder sister. And so, let us talk it over with one another and consider what's best to be done. That's always the best thing to do, isn't it? Talk a matter over and consider what's best to be done. . . . My dear child, you must be very unhappy.

LAURA. Well, not so much exactly unhappy as lonely. I'm so lonely, Miss Shoe. You see, I've no one over here at all. All my people are far away.

MISS SHOE. Yes, indeed. Separated by thousands of miles of ocean, aren't they? Thousands of miles of the blue ocean. Well, my dear, it's all the more reason why you should be very careful. [*Pause.*] Where was it you met Mr Dermott?

LAURA. Oh, in Paris!

MISS SHOE [*horrorstruck*]. In Paris? How long ago?

LAURA. Oh, not very long. About six months.

MISS SHOE. Six months? Did you know much about him when you married him?

LAURA. Nothing at all.

MISS SHOE. And are you not frightened of him?

LAURA. Oh, yes, I'm terrified sometimes, the things he does.

MISS SHOE. My dear, I guessed it. I knew it. Do you know, I knew it the very first evening you sat at dinner. I knew then; I could

tell you were frightened of him. Of course, I didn't say anything to anyone. But, my dear, how rash of you to marry him. [*Pause.*

LAURA [*hanging her head*]. I didn't—*marry* him.

MISS SHOE [*after a moment, with great adroitness*]. Ah, thank you, Laura, thank you. I'm touched, dear, touched by your confiding the truth to me. Because, you see, I know it is the truth. I've always said so.

LAURA [*startled*]. Said so? To whom?

MISS SHOE. Oh, I don't mean actually said out loud. But felt, dear—I mean I've always felt it. Of course, I wouldn't talk of such things. . . . You can trust me for that, dear. And you must trust me, you will trust me, Laura, won't you? Regard me as an elder sister. That's what I must be to you in future. An elder sister.

LAURA. But that's not all, Miss Shoe. There's far worse than that. . . . [*As though forcing herself, determined to carry through something, monotonously*] Did you notice a trunk in our room this morning?

MISS SHOE. Yes, dear. [*Pause.*] *Yes, dear?*

[MISS SHOE *scans* LAURA *in the height of repressed excitement.* LAURA *sits very still.*

LAURA [*after a moment rising and going centre*]. No. I can't tell you. I'm a silly slave, bound hand and foot, and I can't free myself. . . .

MISS SHOE. My poor child! . . . You can't speak of it. I see. . . . But it doesn't matter—because you see, once more, I KNOW!!!

LAURA [*after a moment of astonishment*]. You know? . . .

[*Slight pause.*

MISS SHOE [*with suave assurance*]. Yes, dear, I know. Incredible as it may appear. I haven't lived in the world for nothing; and I've guessed it from the first!

[LAURA *is dumbfounded and has nothing to say. Pause.*

[*Enter* DERMOTT. *The gong rings out.*

[DERMOTT *smiles and looks paternal.* MISS SHOE *rises and hastily makes for the door and disappears, casting a distrustful glance at* DERMOTT *and avoiding him as she goes.*

[LAURA *stands quite still regarding* DERMOTT *with a kind of mournful derision—half sympathetic, half vengeful.*

DERMOTT [*after a moment*]. Well?

LAURA. They know! . . .

[DERMOTT *momentarily stiffens, looks hard at her—she returning his gaze defiantly—and then gradually relaxes into a half-contemptuous, half-good-humouredly amused laugh.*

[*Pause.*

## Scene 2

*The same. About* 9.30 *the same evening. The easy-chair has been moved from the recess back to its original position right of the Chesterfield. The two small chairs have been brought from the recess to the card-table.* Miss Shoe, Mrs Bebb, Mr Durrows, *and* Mrs Beam *sit round playing bridge—*Miss Shoe *facing the audience, her back to the fireplace; opposite her* Mrs Beam, *with only her enormous back showing; and* Mr Durrows *left and* Mrs Bebb *right sideways opposite one another. At the little table close behind* Mr Durrows *sits* Miss Cheezle, *playing a solitary game of patience. To the right* Colin *looks on in an absent-minded way, as if thinking of something else; while* James *stands looking over* Mr Durrows, *and distracting him by making suggestions.*

Mrs Bebb [*a bridge expert*]. Now, dear, leave Mr Durrows alone. His mind's wandering quite enough this evening as it is, without you making him worse.

[*She takes the cards and shuffles them in an expert manner.*

Mr Durrows. That's thirty above, and forty below——

Mrs Bebb. You know, I can't tell you what a disappointment it is to me that this boy of mine won't learn to play.

Miss Shoe. You ought to learn, dear boy. If you feel too shy with others present, you can learn from a book to begin with.

James. No fear! I've something better to do!

[*Making a sign to* Colin *to follow. He goes towards the door,* Colin *following him.*

Mrs Bebb. Are you going to bed, James?

James. I don't know. I should think very likely.

Mrs Bebb. Well, aren't you going to say good-night?

James. I can't say good-night till I know whether I'm going or not, can I? [*He casts a rough glance at the company and goes out with* Colin.

Miss Shoe [*after a little more of the game, in an excited undertone*]. My dear, I've been talking to her this evening, and I've triumphed, absolutely! . . . It's as I said, exactly as I said, in every particular. But I didn't want to tell you in front of the boys, because I don't want them to be mixed up in unpleasant things. . . . Let me tell you now; it was this morning and I wanted some coal.

Mrs Bebb [*shuffling cards*]. Whose deal is it? Oh, it's yours, Miss Shoe.

Miss Shoe. Oh, thank you. [*Begins to deal.*

Mrs Bebb. Mr Durrows, you shouldn't have roughed that heart. I had two in my hand at the time.

Miss Shoe [*dealing*]. Yes, dear, but wait till I tell you. You see, the day before yesterday I had a letter from my brother in America. He's a merchant in the asbestos trade. He's the member of the family who always worried our poor father——

Mrs Bebb. You've dealt wrong, Miss Shoe.

Miss Shoe. Oh, dear me. So I have.

Mrs Bebb. By rights we ought to have a redeal for a thing like that.

Miss Shoe [*going on without taking any notice*]. Well, as I was saying, he always worried our poor father dreadfully. He's the youngest, and he's spoilt. Always was. A very charming boy—the most——

Mrs Bebb. Miss Shoe, you dealt wrong again!

Miss Shoe [*remedying the mistake*]. Oh, yes, so I did. Well, anyway, the most charming of my brothers, but a regular trial to our father, because there didn't seem to be anything he could settle to. [*She stops dealing, three-quarters way through.*] I'm sure you've noticed that. I know I often have—very charming people who can't settle to anything? [*To* Mrs Bebb] Don't you think so, dear?

[*She goes on dealing.*

[Mrs Bebb *heaves a sigh to let down her rising pressure.*

So finally after trying a number of trades he went into asbestos. [*They gather up their cards.*] Now it so happens—now this is a funny thing—that he's run across——

Mrs Bebb. It's your call, Mr Durrows.

Miss Shoe. Yes, dear, but listen to this. [*She lays her hand on* Mrs Bebb's *arm.*] It so happens that in the course of his travels he's run across an adopted son of mine. Now, then! What d'you think of that?

Mrs Bebb. Miss Shoe, I can see every one of your cards. Would you mind holding them up? It's your call, Mr Durrows.

Miss Shoe. Yes, dear, but what d'you think of my having——

Mr Durrows. I'll go three in clubs.

Mrs Bebb. H'm! That's not much good.

Mrs Beam. I'll go three in hearts.

Mrs Bebb. Well, I'll go three in no trumps. Down with you, Mr Durrows, unless Miss Shoe——

Miss Shoe. No.

Mr Durrows. Oh, no—no.

Mrs Beam. No.

Mrs Bebb. Very well. I go three in no trumps. Miss Shoe, it's your lead. [Miss Shoe *leads.*

Miss Shoe [*arranging cards*]. Well, now, this adopted son of mine, as I was saying . . . [Mr Durrows *puts his cards down.*

Mrs Bebb. Mr Durrows, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! I went no trumps on a worse hand than you. That's not the way to declare. I'm afraid you've got a dreadful lot to learn.

[MR DURROWS *simpers deprecatingly and gets up to come round and see his partner's hand.*

MISS SHOE. . . . Yes, it was down at Broadstairs, one year——

MRS BEBB. Now go and sit down, Mr Durrows, and don't come worrying me. I shall pull you through all right, but it's no thanks to you. Now, then, Miss Shoe. [MR DURROWS *returns to his chair.*

MISS SHOE [*taking a trick*]. Oh, well, we must just wait till I tell you this. It's so amusing. [MRS BEBB *puts down her cards impatiently.*] I was sitting on a seat on the front one Sunday morning, and on the same seat at the other end was a young man looking so miserable. Oh, so miserable, I can't tell you. Well, in the end he looked so miserable that I asked him what was the matter, and he told me. He'd only been married to his young wife three weeks when he'd had to come away to England, on urgent business, and he felt so lonely without her.

MRS BEBB. He must have been a sentimental young man. Now suppose you—— [*Picks up her cards.*

MISS SHOE. He was, and, oh, so nice too. A most attractive young fellow I thought. So I talked to him and tried to cheer him up as best I could.

MRS BEBB. You tried to take the place of his wife, in fact? Now come along, Miss Shoe, no trumps, and I'm going to win it, so go on.

MISS SHOE [*while she leads*]. Well, I fancy that would have been difficult, because he was evidently devoted to her.

MRS BEBB [*taking a trick*]. Now you notice, Mr Durrows, how I was careful to throw the lead into my own hand then.

[*She leads and they play.*

MISS SHOE. So the long and short of it was, as I was saying, that I comforted him, and he became my adopted son, or younger brother.

MRS BEBB [*in full swing, rather to herself*]. That's very curious . . . that's three.

MISS SHOE [*taking a trick*]. Did you hear that, dear? He became my adopted son or younger brother—we were never quite sure which.

MRS BEBB. Yes, but will you lead, please? You took the last trick.

MISS SHOE [*as she leads*]. Yes, and when he writes to me, he always addresses me either as one or other. And now he always writes regularly to me, and I to him, and his wife writes too. [MRS BEBB *gathers up a trick, but instead of putting it down spreads the cards out and looks at them.* MISS SHOE *continues unheeding.*] Such splendid letters she writes—so well composed and full of information. . . . Well, naturally, when Raymond was going to America——

MRS BEBB. Miss Shoe!

MISS SHOE. —I wanted him to see these nice young people——

MRS BEBB. Miss Shoe, you hold the ace of clubs.

Miss Shoe. No, dear, I haven't.

Mrs Bebb. You haven't?

Miss Shoe. No . . . you see I wanted him to see these nice young people.

Mrs Bebb. Well, I don't understand that. Have you any clubs at all, Miss Shoe?

Miss Shoe. No. . . . No, I haven't. Why? . . Oh, yes, I have. I beg your pardon. How stupid of me. I have the ace, but it got stuck to the next card. Of course I should have played it. [*Putting it down*] That's it. Now which is my card? Oh, yes. That's right. [*Brightly*] Well, that's my trick then, isn't it?

[*She exchanges the cards and takes the trick.*

Mrs Bebb [*throwing down her cards with a dramatic gesture*]. Oh, no. I'm not going to continue if that sort of thing happens. We'd better put the cards away.

Miss Shoe [*leading a card, not noticing* Mrs Bebb, *loudly to* Miss Cheezle]. I say, Miss Cheezle dear, I'm just telling the romantic story about my adopted son or younger brother; as I say, we were never sure which. Well, they live, these young people, in Parnassus in the State of Maine—Parnassus in the State of Maine, a beautiful part of the country, they tell me. And my brother wrote me a long letter, which I received yesterday, saying he's seen them, and telling me——

Mrs Bebb [*fingering the cards, sullenly, and speaking at the same time as* Miss Shoe]. There it is, and there's the ten. I wondered what had happened. And then you see [*pointedly*], Mr Durrows.

Mr Durrows [*startled*]. Oh, yes. . . .

Mrs Bebb. You see, I purposely threw away the lead in order to find out where the strong card was. But what's the good when people do things like that! [Mrs Beam *rises and goes out.*

Miss Shoe. Aren't you going to continue, dear? Oh, very well. [*Smiling brightly*] I don't mind at all. I'm always willing to fall in with anyone's plans. Well, as I was saying . . . this letter, I was so interested in this letter, that I was in my room all the morning reading it.

Miss Shoe [*rather inaudible because she is now directing her remarks mainly at* Miss Cheezle]. I read it three times. I always do, so as to get everything accurately in the mind, and then in writing an answer. And as it was rather cold, I had a fire and used up all the coals so that this morn-

Mrs Bebb [*still fingering the cards, suddenly*]. Was it the ten or the seven of clubs you had, Mr Durrows?

Mr Durrows [*startled out of listening to* Miss Shoe]. I beg your——

Mrs Bebb. Was it the ten or seven of clubs you had?

ing I found myself without any. Well, as they hadn't brought any up, I suppose not thinking I would want them, and as I didn't want to trouble them, I just thought I'd ask the Dermotts if they could lend me a little. [*Becoming completely audible*] So I went along to them, and what do you think I heard as I went along the landing, but a series of piercing shrieks?

MR DURROWS. Oh—er—the ten I think.

MRS BEBB. Very stupid of me to forget a hand I was playing myself. But if it was I don't see how Miss Shoe came to hold that ace. No, it must have been the seven. Mr Durrows! You're not attending! [*His attention has wandered back to* MISS SHOE. *He is much embarrassed by being in the direct line of fire between her and* MISS CHEEZLE.] And there's a great deal here that you might learn. It wasn't the ten at all. It must have been the seven. . . . Then, when I couldn't draw the ace, I naturally concluded it was on the other side, so I—— However, if people have their attention on other things when they're at play, what can you expect!

[*Indignantly she puts away the cards, rises, and goes over to the sofa and takes a ladies' weekly, into which she plunges with great determination, and a marked ignoring of* MISS SHOE'S *narrative.*

MISS SHOE. Yes, a series of piercing shrieks—issuing from their room. [*To* MRS BEBB] Did you hear this, dear? Mrs Bebb, you should hear this, dear. [MRS BEBB *takes not the faintest notice.* MISS CHEEZLE, *on the other hand, is straining her ears to hear.*] A series of piercing shrieks. Well, I approached the door, very carefully, knocked loudly, waiting till I got an answer. Then I opened the door and looked in cautiously. Well, now, what do you think I saw? . . . Well, I must tell you first. There are four walls to the room, and a fireplace, and two windows. Well, it was just near one of those windows that she was lying—lying unconscious on the floor. . . . And he was sitting on the ground—sitting on the ground, mind you, the perspiration streaming down his face. . . . There's not the least doubt in my mind, especially after what she told me later, that he had been beating her, cruelly beating her. In fact, I think I saw a stick not far off—yes, there was, I'm sure there was one near by.

MR DURROWS. Oh, I say, the man's a positive villain.

MISS CHEEZLE [*severely*]. I'm not a bit surprised. Not a bit.

MISS SHOE. Well, of course, he desisted as soon as I entered, for I

marched boldly in on him, I can tell you, in spite of the danger of his fury. He desisted and even welcomed me in, and was quite polite. I'm sure he thought I hadn't seen him beating her.

MR DURROWS. Oh, a villain, there's no doubt.

MISS SHOE. And then the poor girl—her clothes all untidy and torn, and the tears streaming down her face. Such a pathetic sight—oh, terrible it was. I never thought to see such a thing—and this going on in the very room next to mine!

[*Enter* MISS NEWMAN *in great agitation.*

MISS NEWMAN. I say, d'you know what's happened? Dolly's going off with that damned blackguard—I shouldn't be a bit surprised.

MISS SHOE. What do you mean, dear?

MISS NEWMAN. Well, I've been out to-day, you see—had to go to my aunt's at Blackheath. I didn't want to go, I never wanted to go, because I knew this'd happen. He's got hold of her! That's what's happened! You mark my words, he's got hold of her. Wants her to go and be his secretary. Damned little fool!

MISS SHOE. Dear, don't swear. Nothing is achieved by swearing.

MISS NEWMAN. No, but really—after I'd warned her. I knew this'd happen the minute my back was turned, and with his wife in the room too! With her there in the corner, going and asking—if I've told her once, I've told her a dozen times to be careful of him. [*She sits down.*

MISS CHEEZLE [*vaguely to* MISS SHOE]. What has happened?

MISS SHOE. Mr Dermott has attacked Mrs Stone, dear.

MISS CHEEZLE. Attacked? What did he do?

MISS NEWMAN [*shouting eagerly*]. He's asked her to go away with him as his secretary.

MISS CHEEZLE. Indeed. Well, it's not a thing I'd care to do myself. . . .

MISS NEWMAN. Only yesterday I told her a dozen times to be careful. I've warned her against going out with him; I said I wouldn't accept it and she wasn't to either, and I tell you I wouldn't have gone. I showed that pretty plainly, I expect, and that's why he didn't ask. And after all that, when my back's turned, she goes and does the exact opposite. . . . You see I've always lived with the kid and looked after her. She's made one rotten mistake already in marrying the man she did. I always told her it would be. I told her on her wedding morning, and I wrote it to her the day after, and it's turned out exactly as I said it would. And a jolly good job, too, because he was a rotten card. . . . And now she goes and lets herself in again, going off with this damned blackguard——

MISS SHOE. Yes, dear, but do remember, nothing is achieved by swearing. Now this is just a grand corroboration——

MISS NEWMAN. Well, but I think it's too——

Miss Shoe. A grand corroboration——

Miss Newman [*raising her voice*]. I mean, hang it all——

Miss Shoe [*raising it higher*]. Yes, dear, but this is only a grand corroboration of all I was saying!

Miss Newman [*as loud as she can, at the same time*]. Who knows what may happen. He may take her anywhere, for all we know!

[*Both cease together, and draw breath. But* Miss Shoe *at once goes on, and so extinguishes* Miss Newman.

Miss Shoe [*streaming on*]. I say, this is a grand corroboration of all I was saying. But I had not got to the most interesting part. . . . I say I had not got to the most interesting part. This evening has brought corroborative evidence of all I say. You see, before dinner she spoke to me, and we got into conversation. She told me all about her early life. Her father, Viscount Beeks, now lives in South America, at Rio Janeiro, in Brazil, and she was brought up there, and has no relations on this side of the globe at all. Now she is separated by thousands of miles from her nearest relative—thousands of miles of the blue ocean. . . . She was brought up in a convent in Paraguay, and——

Mrs Bebb [*to her paper*]. Oh, she was brought up in a convent, was she? Well, I always think those are the worst.

Miss Shoe. I beg your pardon, dear?

Mrs Bebb. I say, girls brought up in a convent are always the worst. I used to know a girl who always played her aces second in hand, and I always attributed it to the convent she was brought up in.

Miss Shoe. So I said to her, "Are you happy with this man?" "Far from it," she said. "Far from it. I'm terrified, terrified at the acts he commits," she said. "Oh, my dear," I said, "how rash of you to marry him!" [*Sinking her voice*] She said: "I didn't marry him."

Miss Newman [*straining eagerly*]. What?

Miss Shoe. "I didn't marry him," she said.

Mr Durrows. Oh, this is more than a joke. Something must decidedly be——

Miss Newman. My God! If that isn't the limit, and this very afternoon he's——

Miss Shoe. Oh, my dear child, don't swear. I said, "But, my dear," I said, "how rash you were," no, "what a terrible mistake," that was it, "what a terrible mistake you made," I said, "to marry him." "I didn't marry him," she said, "I didn't marry him."

Mrs Bebb [*coming out of her paper for the first time*]. So that's the glint-eyed hussy, is it? I always knew she was a bad lot.

Miss Shoe. But that is not all. Not by any means. [*Challenging*] We should not be uncharitable to the weaknesses of others. So I

spoke to her kindly. I felt so sorry for the young thing, entrapped by this monster—for I have proof of it, I'll come to that in a moment. "As I see you sitting there," I said, "a beautiful unfortunate——"

MISS CHEEZLE. Oh, you admit, then, that she's unfortunate?

MISS SHOE [*checked in full career*]. Yes, dear, I always admitted that. What I said was——

MISS CHEEZLE. Oh, no. The other day you said you didn't think she was unfortunate. But I thought you'd change your mind before long!

MISS SHOE. Well, dear, never mind. "When I see you there," I said, "a beautiful unfortunate——"

MRS BEBB. Beautiful! I wouldn't call her beautiful.

MISS NEWMAN. Oh, nor would I. . . . Her nose spoils her, I think.

MISS SHOE. "As I see you sitting there," I said, "sucked down by the cruel tide that washes round the shores of the half-world——"

MISS CHEEZLE [*unexpectedly*]. The what?

MISS SHOE. The half-world, dear.

MISS CHEEZLE [*musingly*]. Half-world? What's that?

MISS SHOE. "As I see you sitting there," I said, "I cannot . . . cannot forbear to make an appeal"—you see, I appealed to her, like, to give up her present ways, and to become pure and good, "like those good women," I said, "those good women in the convent in that far-off land where you were brought up."

MRS BEBB [*to her paper, with a world of sarcasm*]. Good women! H'm!

MISS SHOE. And then came the most interesting thing—the proof of all I say. You see, I had opened her heart to me, and when I saw I had made an impression I spoke to her about her conduct with Colin Langford. Now what d'you think she said? Mark the words. Mark the words! I said, "What would Mr Dermott say?" "Oh," she said, "he wouldn't mind. He does the same, only much worse." So I said, "With other women?" "With other women," she said. "With hundreds!"

MISS NEWMAN [*excited*]. Yes, that's true, look at——

MISS SHOE. Mark the words, now. I want you to mark the words. "Hundreds," she said. "But that's not the worst," she said. "That's not the worst!" and then she told me, just in so many words, that things are just as I said—even down to the matter of the trunk!

[*Dramatic pause.*

MISS NEWMAN. She told you . . .?

MISS SHOE. Yes. Told me—that this is the man I had guessed from the beginning he was. My whole theory is proved true in every particular! That is the grand climax! [*Pause.*

MISS CHEEZLE [*stealing* MISS SHOE'S *thunder*]. Oh, I never had any

oubt about it from the beginning. I didn't need to make any investi-ation, because I just knew!

Miss Shoe [*triumphant*]. Now, perhaps, Mrs Bebb dear, you will elieve me that the position is serious.

Mrs Bebb [*after a moment, with menacing deliberation*]. Then you ıean he's going to kill her and eat her, or whatever it is, and he's told ler all about it beforehand? Very thoughtful of him, I'm sure.

Miss Shoe [*after one second's bafflement*]. Most certainly, dear, most ertainly. Or how could she have told me?

Mrs Bebb. Well, and what do you think's in the box after all, Miss hoe?

Miss Shoe [*with ironic emphasis*]. I do not know, dear. We none f us know, dear. But perhaps you will still refuse to believe me, vhen I inform you that she *told* me what was in the trunk!

[*Dramatic pause.*

Miss Newman. Told you?

Mrs Bebb. But I thought you said you didn't know.

Miss Shoe. Yes, told me! That is the grand climax!

[*Triumphant pause.*

Miss Newman. Well, of all the damned——

Miss Shoe. Yes, dear, but do remember, nothing is achieved by wearing. I feel it as much as you do, possibly more. We all must eel such a revelation. Even Mrs Bebb must feel it, though she may retend not to, now that we have proof. But that's no reason why ne——

Mrs Bebb. But I thought he eats them, Miss Shoe; and if he eats hem all, sure there'd be no call to have a trunk——

Miss Shoe. There is no question of eating, and never has been. You know very well, dear, that Mr Durrows's lawyer friend disposed f that.

Mrs Bebb. Maybe it's the bones—but he might use those to make——

Miss Shoe [*hastily*]. Do you hear me, dear? There is no question f eating, and never has been. Accuracy in these matters is essential.

Mrs Bebb. Very well, then, Miss Shoe, if you want to be accurate, ell us what it was exactly she told you was in the box.

Miss Shoe. Trunk, dear, not box.

Mrs Bebb. Well, trunk, then. What did she say was in it?

Miss Shoe. Well, really, I don't think we need go into that.

Mrs Bebb. Oh, I don't want to go into it! . . . I'm only wanting o be accurate, Miss Shoe. What was it she told you? Did she say, ke, "There's the bones of the last one he killed in that trunk," or omething like that?

Miss Shoe. My dear, you mock me. You're doing your best to ıock me.

Mrs Bebb. I don't want to mock you, Miss Shoe. I'm only askii you what she said. Did she say, for instance, "There's the bodies four dead females in that trunk, and I'm to be the next one"?

Miss Shoe. Well, dear, though I forgive you freely, I must say th it is most trying to be treated like this simply because you happen be a little vexed with me over some petty matter. But I forgive yc freely, because I know that you have never been used to dealing wi serious matters. Now let that be enough, if you please. [*Hastr going on*] Well now, I've been thinking about it, and we must proce to lay our plans. But in these things I always think the advice of man is valuable. Men know about these things so much more tha we girls. And so I ask you, as a man, Mr Durrows, as a man, wh do you think we ought to do about it?

Mr Durrows [*after a moment or two's dreaming*]. Well, as a matt of fact, I haven't had a great deal of experience in such things. T only time I came across such things was down at home many yea ago. . . . A curious case it was. A man was suspected of steali horses—and curious thing was, he was brother-in-law to the squi Quite a handsome, fine-looking fellow he was.

Miss Shoe. There now! Isn't that curious? That's exactly wh Miss Cheezle said—these men are often drawn from the best famili in the land. [*To* Miss Cheezle] That's exactly what you said, dea isn't it?

Miss Cheezle [*gloomily wise*]. Oh, yes—I know. . . .

Miss Shoe. When I saw him at lunch to-day, I just thought tha you know. There he was, so charming, talking to Mrs Stone. And just said to myself, "Little you think, my dear, that he's killed ov thirty women already, and that it's quite possible you'll be the next

Miss Newman. Yes; well, he'd better be careful, that's all I c say. Because he's got me to deal with, and he'll find me a pret tough proposition.

Miss Shoe. Now that case you spoke of, Mr Durrows—I fancy was hardly parallel, was it?

Mr Durrows. Hardly parallel?

Miss Shoe. Could one, I mean, deduce from one to the other? we can get any light or guidance from such a case, let us by no mea miss it. What happened in that case? How did they proceed?

Mr Durrows. Well, I really . . . You see, his being brother-in-l of the squire . . . I fancy really nothing happened in the end.

Miss Shoe. Nothing happened, you say. Very well. Then th case clearly cannot help us. We have arrived at the conclusion th that case cannot help us, which is something accomplished anyway.

Miss Newman. I wish my brother from Canada was here. He soon settle it.

Miss Shoe. One thing is, we must strictly and absolutely conceal
m every one all that we know.
Mrs Bebb [*to her paper*]. I don't think that would be hard.
Miss Shoe. Not a word to anyone.
Mrs Bebb. Aren't you going to tell Mrs Beam?
Miss Shoe. Oh, yes, of course. I have already told her.
Mrs Bebb. Why don't you send for the police, and have done with it?
Miss Shoe [*quickly and earnestly*]. Oh, no, dear. We must not on
y account do that.
Mrs Bebb. And why not, if you're so sure?
Miss Shoe. Because of the good name of Mrs Beam's house. If
ou were more familiar with these things, you would realize that. It
ould never do for him to be taken here. No, no. Besides, they're
clumsy. I'm told a man as clever as this would slip through their
igers. . . . No. We must do it ourselves, and that means that we
ust be resolute, but cautious. Resolute, but extremely cautious, and
st every step as we go.
Miss Cheezle [*gloomily*]. Oh, now, whatever you do, I'm quite sure
e'll be one too many for you!
Miss Shoe. Why, dear?
Miss Cheezle. Oh, I just know he will. These men always are.
ou'll find he'll be one too many.
Miss Newman. Not if I have to do with him!
Miss Shoe. Well, dear, all the more reason for us to act wisely. . . .
ow my plans are as follows——
Mrs Bebb [*scanning her paper hard*]. You've been taken in by her,
Iiss Shoe, hoaxed! That's what's happened.
Miss Shoe [*suddenly stopping and looking hard at* Mrs Bebb, *in a
ld, ominous tone*]. What did you say, dear?
Mrs Bebb. You've been hoaxed, I said, taken in. She took your
easure right enough, that's plain to me. Or you're misleading yourself
-one or the other.
Miss Shoe. Now, dear, I know you're vexed with me. You think I
on't see it, but of course I do. A woman of the world sees little
ings like that. But now, don't you think it's foolish to allow your-
lf to be so put out over such a little thing? After all, it's only a
ame. Bridge, I know, is very nice, and all that, but it's only a game.
nd are you not just a little ashamed to be so put out for such a slight
use? I speak, dear, in all sincerity and charity. I do really.
Mrs Bebb [*still looking at her paper*]. Yes. . . . Well, it may be
nly a game. But I can tell you circles in which you'd be cut dead
r doing half as much.
Miss Shoe. Well, dear, very foolish circles they must be. But I
ink you're exaggerating, dear.

MRS BEBB. Exaggerating? I'm afraid you don't know much of th world you live in, that's all——

MISS SHOE [*bristling*]. My dear, I know as much about the world most people, and I'm quite sure I know considerably more than yo otherwise you couldn't make so much of a trifle. Here is a refine young girl—the daughter of a nobleman—in a terrible situation und our very eyes, and you can find it in your heart to get angry over game.

MRS BEBB. What? D'you mean this nonsense about Mr Dermott

MISS SHOE [*with rising heat*]. Dear, I'm afraid you're letting you temper get the better of you.

MISS CHEEZLE [*meanwhile to* MISS SHOE]. Doesn't she think it's th man?

MISS SHOE. She pretends she doesn't, Miss Cheezle. She pretend she doesn't. . . . [MRS BEBB, *however, is not to be drawn. She star at her paper and says nothing.*] Now my plans——

MRS BEBB [*suddenly looking up*]. I do not, Miss Cheezle; I consid she's the worst of the two, if you ask me!

MISS SHOE. My plans—no! I absolutely refuse to divulge the before Mrs Bebb. Mrs Bebb has done nothing but mock, because sh is angry about a game. I consider a person who so easily lets h temper get the better of her is not to be trusted with important in formation. As for myself, I refuse to say one word more. Not single word! [*Slight paus*

MISS NEWMAN. Well, I know I'll have something to say to th damned black——

MISS SHOE. Dear, don't swear! Nothing is achieved by swearing.

MR DURROWS. Would it not—er—could we not—er—communica with her father, this viscount?

MISS SHOE [*eagerly*]. Well, now, that is exactly my plan! I propo at once to communicate with Viscount Beeks in Rio. You see . .

[*Her voice dies away.* MR DERMOTT *has entered. There is sudden complete pause.*

[DERMOTT *advances towards the centre, saying nothin*

MR DERMOTT [*presently, very politely, standing by the fireplace* Well, I'm sorry to interrupt your conversation, ladies and gentlema but I'm afraid I have something urgent that I want to ask Miss Sho if you'll forgive me. . . . Miss Shoe, Laura tells me that you say yo know something against me. She says you told her so this afternoo May I ask you what it is? [*Pause.*] You see, I'm sure you'll reali that it places me in a false position if I don't have a chance of defendi myself. So I feel that it's only fair that you should state to my fa what it is, so that I may have a chance to say what I can on my ow behalf.

Miss Shoe [*after a pause, very determined*]. I have nothing, Mr ermott.

Mrs Bebb. Miss Shoe thinks you're a very charming man, Mr Der- ott. She was saying so not five minutes ago.

Miss Shoe. Oh, now, dear, please. . . .

Mr Dermott. Well, I'm very glad to hear that. Because I esteem iss Shoe very highly. But still . . .

Mrs Bebb. Well, I don't know that there was much esteem about . You see, she's found other things about that she doesn't like at l. She says you've got a trunk full of the bones of dead females in ur room.

Miss Shoe. Mrs Bebb, please——

Mrs Bebb. Oh, yes, and she's seen other things as well that she esn't like—moles on your body and all kinds of dreadful things.

Mr Dermott. Moles on my body?

Miss Newman [*angrily*]. Yes, and personally I shouldn't be a bit rprised.

Mr Dermott [*surprised but smiling*]. You . . .?

Miss Shoe. Mr Dermott—I never said anything of the sort.

Mrs Bebb. Oh, yes, you did. You said you'd seen a mole on his dy, so you did. And you can't deny it, because this isn't an unim- rtant thing like cheating at cards. This is a thing of real importance.

Mr Dermott. Moles on my body a thing of real importance? ell——!

Miss Shoe. I did not cheat at cards. I absolutely refuse to allow u to assert——

Mrs Bebb. No, but you said there were dead females in Mr Der- ott's trunk, and what's more, you said Mrs Dermott had told you so.

Miss Shoe. Believe me, Mr Dermott, this is a piece of wicked mity on the part of Mrs Bebb.

Mrs Bebb. She thinks you're the Bluebeard from Paris that murders e women, Mr Dermott. They say he's in London, and he's got me mole or something behind his ear or on his leg or some such place, d Miss Shoe's seen the very same on you.

Miss Shoe [*in an agony*]. Mr Dermott! Mrs Bebb!

Mrs Bebb. And she says you have a trunk upstairs full of dead nales——

Miss Shoe [*furious*]. Mrs Bebb, I never said such a thing.

Mrs Bebb. What was it you never said?

Miss Shoe. That the trunk was full of dead females.

Mrs Bebb. Oh, and what did you say then?

Miss Shoe. I never said a word about dead females.

Mrs Bebb. I suppose you didn't say he was the Bluebeard from ris?

Miss Shoe [*excitedly*]. Mr Dermott! I insist on being heard! I insist on being heard!

[*She stops abruptly. No one else speaks, so there is an embarrassing pause.*

Mr Durrows. I was reading yesterday that among the Mormons—

Miss Shoe. Of course you'll understand that Mrs Bebb is only joking, Mr Dermott. It's only a joke.

Miss Newman [*jumping up and confronting him*]. Well, there's one thing I want to know anyway, Mr Dermott, that isn't a joke.

Mr Dermott. Yes?

Miss Newman. I want to know what you're up to with Dolly.

Mr Dermott. What I'm up to?

Miss Newman. Yes. What's all this about you wanting her——

Mr Dermott. Oh, that. Oh, but that's quite between ourselves.

Miss Newman. Well, what d'you want her for?

Mr Dermott. Oh, as I say, that's as yet quite between ourselves. It's private.

Miss Newman. Well, anyhow, what d'you go talking to her for, with your wife in the room too?

Mr Dermott. Yes . . . Laura was in the room. But I didn't realize it until the——

Miss Newman [*rudely*]. Oh, that's no excuse. You needn't try to get out of it that way. It's bad enough to go talking to her at all, but to do it with your own wife listening seems to me just about the limit.

Mr Dermott. I'm afraid I don't understand you, Miss Newman.

Miss Newman. Well, to go talking to a girl with your wife in the room listening isn't exactly the thing, is it? I ask you?

Mr Dermott. The . . .? But I've frequently talked to you. I've frequently talked to many people with Laura in the room. May one speak to anyone with one's wife in the room?

Miss Newman. Yes, but that's different.

Mr Dermott. Why?

Miss Newman. It's quite different, and you know jolly well it is.

Mr Dermott. But why?

Miss Newman. Well, you weren't talking to them about the same thing.

Mr Dermott. About engaging a secretary? No. But what is the special about that?

Miss Newman. Well, it's confidential, you said it was yourself.

Mr Dermott. I agree—to the rest of the world. But hardly from my own wife.

Miss Newman. Well, anyway, you know jolly well you oughtn't do it.

MR DERMOTT. Miss Newman, I don't understand you. I have a onversation on business with a young girl——

MISS NEWMAN. Yes, and a pretty one!

MR DERMOTT. Miss Newman—— [*Enter* MRS STONE.] Do you ean to suggest that I was making love to Mrs Stone?

MISS NEWMAN. Yes, I jolly well do. Of course you were!

MR DERMOTT. Did she say I was?

MISS NEWMAN [*not seeing* MRS STONE]. Yes; well, she as good as nplied it, anyhow.

MRS STONE. Oh, you liar, Lena! I never said such a thing.

MISS NEWMAN [*turning round surprised*]. Well, you as good as said ).

MRS STONE. Well, of all the damned——

MISS SHOE [*from behind*]. Don't swear, dear, don't swear. Nothing achieved by swearing.

MR DERMOTT. There we are. Well, Miss Newman, I must confess o some surprise. Mrs Stone reports to you——

MRS STONE. Yes. I told you to say nothing about it. Damned ean, I call it.

MISS SHOE [*from behind*]. My dear——

MRS STONE. You're just jealous, my dear, that's what's wrong with ou. You're just jealous, so you can't mind your own business.

MISS NEWMAN [*flushing all over*]. You're a liar; I'm not!

MRS STONE. Yes, you are. You were——

MISS NEWMAN. Dolly, you're a damned liar. Nothing but a damned ean cat——

MISS SHOE. My dear children, do remember nothing is achieved——

MRS STONE [*moving so as to face* MISS NEWMAN]. Yes, you are, my ear. Oh, I know you. You were just the same with Arthur. You ought he was going to marry you.

MISS NEWMAN [*flinging past* MRS STONE *and going towards the door*]. im? Oh, you're welcome, I'm sure. D'you think I'd have married at cad! And as for him [*at* DERMOTT], it's all the same. [*At the oor*] If he didn't make love to you, you would to him. We all know ou can't keep off anything in trousers!

[*Exit* MISS NEWMAN, *banging the door behind her.* MRS STONE, *stung, rushes after her, again banging the door.*

MR DERMOTT. What an immoral young lady!

MRS BEBB. Go on with you, Mr Dermott. You're a nice one to be alling anyone immoral, when Miss Shoe here tells us that the young dy you drag round with you isn't your wife at all!

MISS SHOE. Now, please, Mrs Bebb——

MR DERMOTT. Oh, of course she isn't, Mrs Bebb. But I thought very one would realize that. Why, you know we come from abroad,

and abroad no one ever marries nowadays. [*Surprised pause.*] Surel every one knows that. Anyone who's been much abroad will, I'm sur bear me out in that statement. Now, who's been abroad here?

Miss Shoe. Well, I haven't been actually abroad, Mr Dermott, bu I have cosmopolitan blood in my veins, and a brother in North an another in South America, or he was; he's back now—and I've rea in books——

Mr Durrows [*starting suddenly and then breaking off*]. Well, once——

Mr Dermott [*looking round*]. No one but Mr Durrows! No where were you, if I may ask, Mr Durrows?

Mr Durrows. Well, it was merely a trip, you know, a trip. I too the boat to Bullone for three days once—Tilbury to Bullone, you kno —very good trips they are—especially if you take a saloon ticket as did. For the same money they give you breakfast with eggs an bacon——

Mr Dermott. To Boulogne, you said?

Mr Durrows. Yes.

Miss Shoe. Oh, yes, Bullong. That's on the north coast of Franc isn't it? Just before the vertical bit.

Mr Durrows. Of course it was only a trip, you know, only a trip——

Mr Dermott. Well, hardly enough for you to judge the customs o the natives by?

Mr Durrows. Well, I don't know. I came back feeling I'd ha some considerable insight into . . . and in my——

Miss Cheezle [*in her vague way*]. What does he say?

Miss Shoe. Mr Dermott says, dear, that nowadays abroad, marriag has been done away with.

Miss Cheezle. Marriage? Done away with?

Miss Shoe. Yes, dear.

Miss Cheezle. Oh, but I thought that every one knew that!

Mr Dermott [*delighted*]. There! You'll support me, won't you Miss Cheezle?

Miss Cheezle. Oh, no. There's no such thing as marriage abroa these days. I should have thought you'd have known that. Why look at that Madame What's-her-name that was here last year, an how we all agreed she wasn't married to the man. Oh, no. . . .

Mr Dermott. Oh, no! Of course not. I mean, well, take an country, take Brazil, where Laura comes from, take Italy, Russi Germany, take almost anywhere outside England, and you'll find tha marriage is practically an obsolete institution.

Mrs Bebb. I don't believe you, Mr Dermott.

Miss Shoe. Oh, well, Germany doesn't count—obviously they don' count.

MR DURROWS [*vaguely*]. Oh, no. . . .

MISS SHOE. Or for that matter, Austria, or Rumania—no, I mean Bulgaria. And then in Russia, of course, the women have been nationalized.

MRS BEBB. What's that? How d'you mean nat . . .?

MISS SHOE. My dear, nationalized. Nationalized by the Government.

MR DERMOTT. Yes, but take any country; take Spain, Italy, or, as I say, Brazil.

MISS SHOE. Well, but, Mr Dermott, the King of Spain is married. He married, as we all know, the Duke of Rutland's second daughter, Mary. And then——

MR DERMOTT. Oh, yes, but——

MISS SHOE [*drowning him*]. And then, the Czar of Russia that was, he married the daughter of the Duke of Sheswig—first cousin to our King. And it's rumoured that the Prince of Wales is engaged——

MR DERMOTT. Oh, yes—kings. They do. But that's for ceremonial purposes. But others——

MISS SHOE. But, Mr Dermott, President Wilson is married. I saw his wife myself, driving in the carriage with him. Even Trotsky, they say, is married. And a young couple I know of who live in Parnassus in the State of Maine are married.

MR DERMOTT. Ah, but how do you *know* these people are married? Take President Wilson. How do you know that actually was his wife with him?

MR DURROWS [*laughing wisely to himself*]. Oh, no, Mr Dermott, you can't persuade me of that. President Wilson. Oh, no. Ha! ha! Why, it stands to reason.

MR DERMOTT. But why does it stand to reason?

MR DURROWS. Of course it stands to reason. Come now, oh, no! Ha! ha! ha! . . . Come to think of it, I believe there was a young couple in this hotel I stayed in at Bullone that they said weren't married. But that was France, and we all know the French are a bit risky. . . . Of course we all know of the Mormons too. But not as a general rule. No, not as a general rule. Ha! ha! [*He shakes his head wisely.*

MRS BEBB [*with finality*]. Oh, no; oh, no. You can't talk like that, Mr Dermott. Socialists and a few people like that. A few cranks may do these kind of things. But sure nobody takes any account of what they do.

MISS SHOE. Well, of course, I admit, Mr Dermott, that among the American Indians and the Australian Totems——

MRS BEAM [*who has entered a moment or two before, standing at back*]. Well, Mr Dermott, we're not among the American Indians or the tea-totems, or whatever they are, here, and we've got to face facts—or at

least I have. And the fact that matters to me is that you're living in my house with a woman that isn't your wife, and I can't have it.

MR DERMOTT. Oh, but, Mrs Beam, why? I mean——

MISS SHOE. Oh, Mr Dermott, surely you can't fail to realize——

MRS BEAM. Well, I'll tell you why. Because I know my business even if I am a bit heavy. The reason is that I've got my living to earn, and if you stay in my house my living will be gone.

MISS SHOE. Mrs Beam means, don't you see, Mr Dermott——

MR DERMOTT. Why would your living be gone, Mrs Beam?

MISS SHOE. Because, don't you see, Mr——

MRS BEAM. Because I rely on goodwill to get people to come here and to stay here. This isn't a prison or a monkey-house, though I sometimes think it looks like it, some of the people that come—I'm not referring to the present company of course—and I can't force people in here. And with you living here with a girl, they wouldn't come.

MR DERMOTT. Oh, but how foolish of them!

MISS SHOE. Oh, Mr Dermott, how can you——

MRS BEAM. Well, that's not my affair. I've got to live off them, not to judge them, and if they don't like harems I'm not here to blame their funny taste. And I tell you they wouldn't come, and, what's more, they'll all go away if you stay, and the servants too. Isn't that so? I ask you as a sensible woman, Mrs Bebb?

MISS SHOE. Oh, yes—I'm sure Mr Dermott must see that——

MRS BEAM. Of course they would. You're a luxury, Mr Dermott, that's a bit too expensive, if I may say so. So I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to leave to-morrow, along with your young lady. And since you brought her here under false pretences the law's on my side.

[*She goes to the door.*

MR DERMOTT [*going after her*]. Oh, but, Mrs Beam, consider the short time. Of course, if you wish it, we must. But it's so awkward.

MRS BEAM. Now run along, Mr Dermott. You're not the first bad card I've dealt with. You're very nice people, some of you, but you're no good to me.

[*She goes through the door.* MR DERMOTT *after her protesting. Shortly after exit* MR DURROWS.

MRS BEBB [*rising and getting ready to go to bed*]. Well, are you satisfied now?

MISS SHOE. What d'you say, dear?

MRS BEBB. Are you satisfied? I thought you'd——

MISS SHOE [*rising*]. Yes, dear. I am more than satisfied, but I do not wish to discuss the matter. Let us drop it.

MRS BEBB. Yes. I thought you'd want to drop it when you were proved wrong.

MISS SHOE. I say I am completely satisfied that my suspicions are well founded.

MRS BEBB. Suspicions? But I thought you said you knew.

MISS SHOE. So I do know. And yet the mystery will never be cleared up, because he will profit by the timely warning you have given him. [*Gets box of Plasmon biscuits.*

MRS BEBB. But I thought there was no mystery.

MISS SHOE. Neither there is. And yet, as I say, it will never be cleared up, because of your foolish action, dear, caused by a little vexation over a game. Let it be a warning to you. You may have the lives of many innocent women on your conscience. But one thing I can do, and that is to save Laura from his clutches. She looks to me, looks with confidence to me, and I shall not disappoint her.

MRS BEBB. Miss Shoe, you take it from me, she's worse than he is.

MISS SHOE. She is not, dear, and I won't have you say she is. I shall not allow you to stand there and slander a poor unfortunate girl . . . a girl, moreover, of noble birth, the daughter of a viscount. . . . And may I say while I am about it that I resent your saying I cheated at cards; resent it keenly.

MRS BEBB [*on her way to the door*]. But you did, Miss Shoe.

MISS SHOE. I did not. I did not cheat.

MRS BEBB [*going out*]. Well, that's what it would be called in the best bridge circles.

MISS SHOE [*going out after her in her eagerness, and leaving the door open*]. Well, dear, as I say, very foolish circles they must be. After all, a game—— [*Their voices die away, still in argument.*

[*Pause.* MISS CHEEZLE *has begun slowly to gather her things together. She walks always with a stick. Re-enter* MISS SHOE.

And now I am going to write at once to Viscount Beeks!

MISS CHEEZLE [*vaguely, as she gets herself under way*]. Viscount . . .? Have you got his address?

MISS SHOE. No, I didn't like to ask her. But he's such a well-known man, I'm sure. "Viscount Beeks, Rio, South America," will find him.

MISS CHEEZLE [*still vague and gloomy*]. Oh . . . good night.

[MISS SHOE *has sat down at a little bureau with her back full turned.*

MISS SHOE [*getting some paper ready*]. Good night!

[*Pause.* MISS SHOE'S *whole back is expressive of a congenial task.*

## ACT III

*The same. Dinner-time the next evening. The card-table has been replaced against the right wall, the two small chairs have been taken back to the recess, and the little table and other chairs are in the same position as when the play commenced. On a chair are a coat, hat, etc., belonging to* LAURA.

LAURA *lies languidly on the settee;* COLIN *stands in a puzzled attitude near by.*

LAURA. Yes, Colin, I'm afraid it's really good-bye. . . . I was feeling as if it was good-bye this morning when we went out, but that seems ages ago now, doesn't it? . . . Don't you think the day has seemed ever so long? . . . Never mind, it's nearly over now. . . . I hope nobody'll come. I think they're all at dinner.

COLIN [*standing with his back to the door*]. But I don't see why you must go. You said you weren't going yesterday.

[*The door opens quietly and* DERMOTT *steals in; he stands a moment watching them, and then walks out again slowly and vaguely, as if waiting for something, looking at his watch as he does so.*

LAURA. Oh, Colin, I wonder how many times you've said that this afternoon. And I've told you I must. [*Exit* DERMOTT.] So please don't keep on about it. I can't stay with you, but I've done all I can. I've spent the whole day with you to make up.

COLIN. But, Laura, why have you changed, after what you said yesterday? . . . I can't . . . I don't understand it. I can't follow it.

LAURA. Come here. Come and sit down beside me. Do you know, if I really thought you'd want me always, I'd stay.

[COLIN *sits down beside* LAURA.

[*Enter* DERMOTT *again. This time he is more impatient. He tries to catch* LAURA'S *attention without making* COLIN *aware he is there, but she doesn't see him, or, at any rate, pay any attention to him.*

But you won't. Do you know, you'll hate and despise me before this evening's past?

COLIN. But I can't imagine hating and despising you. I don't know what you're talking about.

[*Exit* DERMOTT.

LAURA. D'you know, Colin, if I thought you wouldn't in the end regret it, I'd throw up everything and stay. If I thought you really wanted me, and would always want me, I'd stay. But you won't, dear.

COLIN. But I will, I tell you. How do you know what I want?

LAURA. Because, dear, I'm older. That's how I know. You know really I'm far older than you; and far wiser. [*She looks at her watch.*] There, I've only got a few minutes, then I must get my things on. You may do what you like with me for three minutes. [*He puts his arm round her, and she leans luxuriously against him, stretching herself.*] Oh, dear, why can't we always be like this. I could live here for ever with you, Colin.

COLIN. Well, why not let's, then?

LAURA [*looking up lazily at him*]. Oh, Colin, you are a terrible boy in some ways. . . . [*Pause.*

[*About this time* DERMOTT *enters once more, now in great perturbation.* LAURA *sees him, and he signs frantically to her that there's no time to lose, and that she must come at once. But she goes on with* COLIN, *completely ignoring him.*

Oh, Colin, you don't know how I'm enjoying myself at this moment. . . . Think of the distance I've got to go to-night. You'll think of me, won't you, Colin?

COLIN. Yes, I expect I shall. . . . God, won't it be awful!

[*He laughs, disconsolate.*

LAURA. And yet, you know, it won't be nearly as bad for you as it will for me. I'm not unique in the ways you like me in. [*She twists herself, so as to look right into his face.* DERMOTT *signs to her.*] But I shall never see anyone like you again, ever, Colin.

DERMOTT [*going out, ferociously in an undertone to himself*]. I'll shift you, you little devil, see if I don't!

[*He disappears.* COLIN *starts and looks round.*

LAURA. There! [*Mockingly*] Did he hear a sound! And is his love so small that one little sound blows it all away, all away! That's how much you love me. You don't know how to love more than that yet. But, you see, I've been through all, and I shall never see anyone like you again ever. . . . [COLIN *appears not to be wholly listening.*] There! Time's nearly up! Kiss me!

COLIN [*disconsolate*]. No, I don't want to. And we've wasted all the time.

LAURA. No, we haven't—kiss me! I've got a lot to do, you know. Kiss me!

COLIN. That's just where you're lucky—something to distract your attention instead of just looking out on the same beastly old road. Oh, damn it! Look at us spending time talking about distracting attention! Why can't we—— [*He breaks off suddenly.*

LAURA. Well, I think mine's the best way of spending it—the way I'm asking you.

[*He kisses her, and she clings to him in a close embrace. The door opens, and* DERMOTT *is seen ushering in* MISS SHOE.

DERMOTT. Yes, Miss Shoe, by all means. Just in there she is. D'
go and speak to her. [*To himself behind the door*] And for God's sak
chase her out!

[DERMOTT *disappears.* MISS SHOE *enters fussily with a pape*
*in her hand.* LAURA *clings to* COLIN *as though defiant o*
MISS SHOE. *Once more* COLIN *is dreadfully embarrassed.*]

MISS SHOE [*in a loud voice*]. Ah, there you are, dear. I've run yo
to earth at last. I've been looking for you all day. [*She sits down.*
Because I have something very special to speak to you about.

[COLIN, *in spite of his embarrassment, lingers*

LAURA [*viciously*]. I thought you were all at dinner.

MISS SHOE. Yes, dear, but you see I forewent half my dinner i
order to have an opportunity of speaking quietly to you alone! I fore
went half my dinner. . . . I have something very important to say.

[*She begins to read her paper as if in no hurry. Pause.* COLI
*goes out.*

[*Glancing meaningly after* COLIN] Oh, my dear child, you know what
told you. I'm afraid I shall have great trouble with you. Howeve
—I have great news—great news, dear sister—I am your elder siste
am I not? Well, I've spoken to Mr Dermott about you, and I've pe
suaded him to promise to place no obstacle in the way of your remai
ing behind when he goes. Also, I've written to your father, Viscoun
Beeks——

LAURA [*after a moment, ominously*]. D'you know what I think you are

MISS SHOE. No, dear. [*Smiling at her*

LAURA [*slowly*]. A damned nosey old fool. [*Rises*

[*After gazing a little, while she gets the unexpected import of th*
*words,* MISS SHOE *returns hastily to her paper, at which sh*
*continues to gaze like a stone statue.*

I said a damned nosey old fool. You haven't got any business of you
own, you must come and spoil every one else's. You blasted old rag
bag. You old bit of dirt out of the street. [MISS SHOE *hides herself*
*behind her paper.*] . . . If I had my way with you, d'you know wha
I'd do? I'd beat you till all your skinny old bones rattled togethe
. . . together. . . . Damn you! Damn you! Damnation take you
Booh! Bah! [*She points at* MISS SHOE *and roars with laughter. Ente*
DERMOTT. *He stands by the door.*] You come talking to a girl like me
taking me under your dirty old wing. What are you yourself? I don'
believe you're a bit good. I believe you run after men like anything
You ancient old Venus, I believe you've lived with ever so many men
. . . I believe you're living with heaps now. . . .

[MISS SHOE *covers her ears with her hands*

MR DERMOTT [*his purpose accomplished, profiting by* MISS SHOE'S *con-*
*fusion to reappear*]. Yes, that's all right, and now come on, and fo

God's sake hurry. Your taxi's at the door, and everything's ready. I'll hold them for five minutes while you get away. Five minutes! *Ligero! Ligero!* [*He utters some hurried, vicious Spanish.*

LAURA [*in a low voice*]. *Esta bien, venga pronto!*

[*She gathers up her things and rushes out.* DERMOTT *disappears at once. There is a long pause.* MISS SHOE *sits with her back like stone, staring at her paper, as if she was afraid if she moved an inch the unexpected storm would break forth again. Presently there is a noise of people coming upstairs, and* MISS SHOE *hastily moves to settee and sits, pretending to read her paper. Enter* MRS BEBB, JAMES BEBB, COLIN, *and a little after* MISS CHEEZLE. COLIN *looks distracted, and goes over and sits down in the recess.* MISS CHEEZLE *sits in her usual chair;* JAMES *goes to right of settee.* MRS BEBB *sits on settee to right of* MISS SHOE.

MRS BEBB [*as she crosses*]. Yes, I prefer them done with the potatoes round them myself. . . . Well, now, we're going to hear a lecture or something from Mr Dermott, aren't we? He wants to say something to us all. . . . Well, Miss Shoe, have you found the young lady you're so anxious to take under your wing? I think you've taken on a tough job myself. I've always said so. I think she's the worse of the two, if you ask me. [*Pause. No answer from* MISS SHOE.] Eh? Don't you think so? Perhaps you're beginning to agree with me after all.

MISS SHOE [*quickly, but with little movement*]. No, dear—no, I don't admit that. I don't admit that by any means.

MRS BEBB. Well, it's a matter of taste, I suppose. . . . Did you find her after all?

MISS SHOE [*after a moment's hesitation, very decidedly*]. No, dear. I haven't seen her.

MRS BEBB. No, I thought you wouldn't. So you've lost half your dinner for nothing. You take my advice and leave all this alone. You insist that this girl's an angel. Well, I say she's a bad lot. You take it from me.

MISS SHOE. We mustn't be uncharitable, dear.

[*Enter* MRS BEAM. *She goes to right of fire.*

MRS BEBB [*to* MRS BEAM]. Well, what about this communication that Mr Dermott said he had to make to us—something he wants to say or something. Where is he? I thought he'd be here. They go to-morrow, don't they? I didn't see either him or the girl at dinner.

MRS BEAM. Yes. He asked for the extra day, and as I don't want to be unpleasant, and as we all know now, and no further harm could be done, I said he might stay the extra night—especially as he's paid right up to the end of the week. You see we——

[*Enter* MR DERMOTT *with an immense knife or scimitar in his*

*hand, thus causing some repressed surprise and apprehension, especially in* Miss Shoe *During the whole of the following speech he keeps up this apprehension by helping out his explanations with gestures made with the scimitar—gestures which, if regarded coolly, are merely urbane flourishes, but appear very different to the heated imagination of certain of the company.*

Mr Dermott [*smiling*]. Well, ladies and gentleman, you'll remember my asking this morning that I might be allowed as a great favour to say something to you, to make a kind of farewell speech to you this evening. It's a curious request, I admit, but still . . . if I may, I should like to do so at once, for I haven't very much time. . . . May I begin? Because, as I say——

Mrs Beam. Yes, Mr Dermott, certainly.

Mrs Bebb. Fire away, Mr Dermott, we've been waiting for you.

Mr Dermott. Mrs Stone, Miss Newman, and Mr Durrows, I understand, are out. I'm sorry for that, because I wanted every one—every one in the house—to hear what I had to say, so as to avoid misunderstanding. However, it can't be helped.

[Miss Cheezle *advances her chair almost to underneath his nose and sits with her hand to her ear, looking hard at* Mr Dermott.

Well, yesterday, as you know, Mrs Beam told us we must depart—must depart, in fact, to-day. . . . With the best will in the world, I didn't think we could make the necessary arrangements so quickly. So I represented to Mrs Beam that, while it was our desire to fall in with her wishes, it would be very difficult—very difficult indeed, for us to arrange it; and so she, with great generosity, consented to allow us to remain until to-morrow. For this grace I thank her heartily, and it is now my pleasant duty to inform her that, in view of her kindness and the respect we have conceived for her, we have worked with a will—or rather I have [*he smiles*]—and to such good effect, that we shall not have to trespass upon her beyond this evening. Laura has already gone, and I propose to leave the house the moment I have said what I have to say. That is the first thing.

[*Some consternation. He looks at his watch.*

Well, now, that brings me to the next thing. Miss Shoe has appealed to me—has made a very strong and moving appeal to me, if I may say so—not to force Laura to continue a life which Miss Shoe thinks immoral. She asked me to give her a promise that I would leave Laura free to go with me or remain behind as she desired, and she also was generous enough to say that if Laura remained behind she herself would look after her . . . until such time as her father, Viscount Beeks, who, as you know, is in South America, could be acquainted

with the facts. Well, that promise not to try to force or persuade Laura into going with me, I freely gave; I told Miss Shoe that I could conceive of few more unpleasant tasks in this world than that of trying to force Laura to do something she didn't want to. I'm afraid Miss Shoe didn't believe me; but then she doesn't know the fiery side of Laura's character perhaps as well as I do. . . . [*He smiles.*] Well, now, Miss Shoe may be surprised and perhaps disappointed that, in spite of her kind efforts, Laura has gone. Well, Miss Shoe, it is not my doing. My promise, as you know, I have kept to the letter. I told her you wished to speak to her. I have put no restraint of any kind upon Laura—I couldn't if I would. [*He smiles.*] And this very evening, not half an hour ago, since you had not been able to see her previously, I myself went out of my way to bring you to her. . . . Well, Miss Shoe, I can only say I'm sorry such generous intentions should be baulked, but I wonder if you really understand the task you were setting yourself. I know you have always had a wonderful influence over Laura, [*with traces of mockery in his tone*] and she has always been gentle and docile with you, but, I assure you, at heart she's a wild creature. . . .

[Miss Shoe *displays great uneasiness. He smiles and looks at his watch.*

Well, now, finally, if I may, I want to perform a little ceremony. [*He looks at the scimitar, and pauses.*] It is a little ceremony which I have been accustomed to perform wherever I have been and have conceived a special admiration for any member of the company. [*He looks at* Miss Shoe.] And on this occasion, I must confess that, in spite of what has happened, and, indeed, partly as a result of it, I have conceived a special admiration for one member of the present company. . . . Miss Shoe! I want to present you with this . . . er . . . little weapon, in token of the respect which I have conceived for you. It's a little present, if I may say so, Miss Shoe, out of that famous trunk! The trunk about which Miss Shoe had such dreadful ideas. . . . This was really in that trunk. . . . It's old Persian work, and gradually found its way across the world to Chile, where I picked it up, so, like Miss Shoe, it has, so to speak, cosmopolitan blood in its veins. But unlike Miss Shoe—at least I hope unlike Miss Shoe—it has been, I was assured, the means of bringing to an end a considerable number of promising careers, especially female careers. So, though it isn't itself a dead female, it seems to have been the means of making some. . . .

[*With a flourish he presents the knife to* Miss Shoe, *who, thoroughly frightened, drops it at once. He has by this time galvanized his audience into a kind of rigidity.*

Dear me, I've been much longer than I intended. I'm afraid I must

go this instant, or I shall miss Laura. I haven't time even to shake hands. However, good-bye, and thank you all again.

[*He has meanwhile been moving towards the door. At the last words, with a bow, he disappears. Tension suddenly relaxes.*

JAMES. Well, he's a funny cook. . . .

MRS BEAM [*suddenly jumping up*]. Mr Dermott! Mr Dermott!

[*She rushes out. A door bangs below.* MISS SHOE *goes over to the window.*

MISS SHOE. He's gone! He's running down the street! [*They all crowd round the window.*] Well, that was sudden, I must say. That was a sudden development, wasn't it?

[*Exit* MISS CHEEZLE *as if with a purpose.*

JAMES [*who has taken the scimitar and is enjoying himself with it*]. Well, I think he was a sportsman myself. I wish there were a lot of women's heads here. I'd cut 'em off. [*He makes a suitable movement.*

MISS SHOE. Oh, my dear boy!

[*He lunges at* MISS SHOE *and frightens her.*

JAMES. No, I won't kill you yet. I'll let you off. Here you are.

[*He presents it to her, point first.*

MISS SHOE. Put it on the table, dear boy.

MRS BEAM [*who has returned, panting*]. He's gone. I couldn't catch him.

MRS BEBB. What did you want him for?

[*Exit* JAMES, *after putting scimitar on table.*

MRS BEAM. Why, I had some change of his—three-and-fourpence it was. He seems to have forgotten all about it. However, I'll put it in the lifeboat box. That'll do as well. . . . Well, that was sudden, wasn't it?

MISS SHOE. That's just what I was saying.

MRS BEAM. What beats me is how they managed everything, and got somewhere to go, and all in the time. They've left no address; I don't know what we'll do if any letters come for them, that I don't. . . . However, they paid up, and we're rid of them, that's one comfort. What with her hanging her things out of the windows, I don't know where we'd have been in another day or two. [*She bustles out.*

MRS BEBB [*getting basket from table and sitting on settee. At* MISS SHOE]. They were just a nice pair.

[MISS SHOE, *however, says nothing, and sits very stiff.*

[*Again*] Yes. That's what they were. Just a nice pair. . . . [*Presently, trying again*] I thought you said you didn't speak to her.

MISS SHOE [*after a moment*]. What, dear?

MRS BEBB. I thought you said you didn't speak to her.

MISS SHOE. Who, dear?

MRS BEBB. That girl.

MISS SHOE. Neither I did, dear. You see——

MRS BEBB. But he said you had.

MISS SHOE. Yes, dear, it's true I saw her this evening. But I had really no opportunity of saying anything to her, none at all. It was only for a moment that I saw her, and it wasn't possible to say anything. . . .

MRS BEBB. Yes. Well, I call them a good riddance myself. They were just a pair, one as bad as the other.

MISS SHOE [*stiffly, after a pause*]. I don't agree with you, dear.

MRS BEBB. Oh, no, you take it from me—you were taken in entirely. She wasn't what you took her for at all—not by any means. I'm sure you see that now. He said himself she's a wild creature.

MISS SHOE [*after a moment*]. Never with me. Never with me. He referred distinctly to that. You heard him refer distinctly——

[*The door opens and* MR DURROWS *enters, very pompous and a little unsteady, with an elaborate chain and pendant, such as ladies wear, round his neck, but hanging down his back. He staggers to centre.*

MR DURROWS I have a communication, a most important message, from that wonderful fellow D-dermott. . . . It's a beautiful evening —most lovely evening. . . . By the way, I have a communication, if I may say so, from that excellent fellow Dermott—a Spanish count in disguise he was—of course he didn't tell anyone but me, because as a matter . . . well . . . discretion. But I knew it all along. Anyone familiar with him could have——

MISS SHOE [*trying to be natural*]. It's turned colder, I think, this evening.

MR DURROWS. I was just coming away from giving Dermott his final instructions. [*He turns round and they see the chain and locket.*

MRS BEBB. Miss Shoe, isn't that your chain he has?

MISS SHOE. It is indeed. How could he have got it? [*With rising agitation*] He must have been raiding our rooms in his drunken fury.

MR DURROWS [*meanwhile*]. We're working together for the regeneration of the world—no one knows about it yet . . . he in Russia. I here. . . . Of course I'm the leader. [*Going unsteadily towards the door*] I have a number of very important things—very important——

MISS SHOE. Mr Durrows! Mr Durrows! Collect yourself. Where did you get that chain?

MR DURROWS [*focusing his drunken gaze on* MISS SHOE]. Aha! . . . Oh, yes.

[*He approaches her, and bends down close to her, she drawing away disgusted. A 'phone bell begins to ring and sounds of commotion begin to be heard in the rest of the house.*

[*Huskily in her face*] I congratulate you! I know about it. I am

responsible really. He gave it me to give to you not more than a few moments ago. [*Straightening himself*] Some one suggested we were in a bar, but that's quite unfounded, merely a rumour, because in all my life I have never—— [*Suddenly bending down again, ogling her, and raising his hands as if to touch her.*] Yes, I know! I am really——

Miss Shoe [*rising in horror and going to table*]. Mr Durrows! How dare you, sir! [*Seizing the scimitar*] I warn you, I shall protect myself against your outrage!

[*At the sight of the scimitar* Mr Durrows *stops abruptly.*

Mr Durrows [*fixing it with his drunken gaze*]. Ha! Mine! Keep it in my room. . . . [*Then with great cunning*] You've been in my room again. . . . Oh, you naughty old girl. . . . Very well.

[*Sits on sofa.*

Miss Shoe [*vehemently, from a safe distance*]. Give me my chain, sir! Give me my chain!

Mr Durrows. Oh, no . . . you give me my scimitar. I got your chain; you've got my scimitar. . . . You've been in my room again.

Miss Shoe. Mr Durrows!

Mr Durrows. You're not safe, I shall have to lock my door. [*Suddenly bursting into song*] "I passed by your window . . ."

[*During this the sounds of commotion in the rest of the house have gradually increased. At this moment* Mrs Beam *bursts into the room in great excitement.*

Mrs Beam. They've taken everything of value they can lay their hands on! The police have just rung up to say they're big thieves wanted for robbing banks, and I don't know what all. They've cleared Miss Cheezle's room, and I expect everybody's are the same. I should go and see. [*As* Miss Shoe *and* Mrs Bebb *rush out*] The girl must have taken them when she went, so they're well away by this time!

[*She rushes out after the others.* Mr Durrows *struggles to rise by the aid of the scimitar, and presently gets on his legs.*

Mr Durrows [*huskily singing, as he goes through the door, flourishing he scimitar*]. "I passed by your window, when the morning [*f*] was [*ppp*] red. . . ."

[*Exit* Mr Durrows. Colin, *who all through the latter part of the scene has sat looking stunned and puzzled and taking a minimum of interest in it, now rises from the corner, and, coming out in a dazed way in front of the fireplace, stands leaning against the mantelpiece, still puzzled.*

[*Pause.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY

# THE MAN WITH A LOAD OF MISCHIEF

By ASHLEY DUKES

*First produced at the Haymarket Theatre, London, June 15, 1925*

CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

| | |
|---|---|
| An Innkeeper | His Wife |
| A Nobleman | His Man |
| A Lady | Her Maid |

*The scene throughout is a wayside inn.*

IN his fascinating little book *The English Drama* Mr H. F. Rubinstein observes: "The Round Head, metamorphosed in the High Brow, has already discovered the importance of not being Shavian, and a new cause invented by Gordon Craig has attracted many zealots by its mystery and its unpopularity. . . . Two poet-playwrights, Clifford Bax and Ashley Dukes, harking back to old æsthetic values, show signs of having fallen under its spell. . . . In *The Man with a Load of Mischief* Dukes reflects the revolutionary ardour of a Beaumarchais through a surface of polished euphuism."

Mr Ashley Dukes has been a dramatic critic for nearly twenty years, and has frequently expounded his theories of drama. "Some writers for the theatre, like the impressionist painters of the end of the last century, now seek to give the essentials, rather than the details, of dramatic action and portraiture. . . . These are methods of approach (or, as actors sometimes say, of 'attack') that differ fundamentally from the naturalistic method, and contain within themselves the seed which comes to flower in dramatic style. The will to style is a blind impulse of the theatre which may be given direction by the playwright."

Such a playwright is Mr Dukes himself, a stylist who, while stressing the importance of words, takes stance in militant opposition to what Mr Drinkwater has called plays of hearsay.

*The Man with a Load of Mischief* is a dramatic poem in prose which it is interesting to compare in theme and treatment with *By Candlelight*,

adapted by Captain Harry Graham from the German of Siegfried Geyer. Mr Dukes' adaptation of a French war-play under the English title of *No Man's Land* had a run at the St Martin's Theatre, and his adaptation of a German play, *Such Men are Dangerous*, was produced by Mr Matheson Lang at the Duke of York's Theatre. The author has also made a stage version of *Jew Süss*.

# ACT I

SCENE: *A room in an inn. Evening.*

*Enter the* INNKEEPER, *lighting candles one by one.*

INNKEEPER. An empty house, and candles ninepence a pound; we are burning money. I'll bar the shutters: a man's a fool to light the road for nothing. If wayfarers were moths, ha, ha! If they came fluttering to the window-panes for their pot of treacle! [*He bars the shutters.*] But there's no hope of custom, unless it be a drunken farmer or a soldier out of service; and they need no glimmer to guide them while their noses show the way. Well, God help midwives, innkeepers, and sextons, who keep the world moving; and the devil take travellers who stay at home! Past eight o'clock. Heigho! A drop of comfort would not be amiss.

[*He takes a bottle from a cupboard, and is groping for a glass when his* WIFE *comes in, bustling, and takes him by the collar.*

WIFE. Lighting up the parlour, were you? I know the candle you would set afire! Lord save us from a doctor that swallows his own physic! On with your coat, and give the snuffers here. Smartly there, smartly! For shame on you! With the quality on the road and expected every hour!

INNKEEPER. Every hour, indeed! 'Tis bedtime for all honest folks.

WIFE. Then you should sit up late. And so you shall, I promise you. While horses tire there's work for grooms. I have the best beds aired and the warming-pans at the kitchen hearth.

INNKEEPER. Then we have all but guests.

WIFE. Aye, clever, so we have. But what if I told you that we have guests, and guests of quality, coming this very hour?

INNKEEPER. I should say, wife, you were dreaming.

WIFE. Then stir yourself, for 'tis true.

INNKEEPER. Guests? Who are they?

WIFE. A gentleman and a lady now coming up the hill from Six Mile Bottom. The lady in her own coach, and the gentleman mounted on as nice a mare as ever Moony Dick did see. And both of them bound for this house, by the advice of Moony, for it was he that passed them on the road.

INNKEEPER. Well, well. This is good news. Did you give him a penny for himself?

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WIFE. I gave him twopence and a pint of ale.

INNKEEPER. It was too much, until we see the colour of their money. [*Buttoning his jacket with importance*] They'll look for me on the doorstep. Bring me my leather apron.

WIFE. Time enough for that. Their horses walk. They are in no hurry, says Moony, with the gentleman stooping down from his saddle to peep into the coach, and the lady smiling at him behind the windows.

INNKEEPER. Are they alone?

WIFE. She has a maid with her, and he a servant.

INNKEEPER. So. A gentleman with his servant?

WIFE. And a lady with her maid.

INNKEEPER. Are these two man and wife, does Moony think?

WIFE. Man and wife! Did man and wife ever dawdle after dark? It was the accident that brought them together.

INNKEEPER. It must have been an accident to bring custom to this house.

WIFE. And very near a funeral too, says Moony, but for the rescuers, in the nick of time. Oh, I love bravery in a man!

INNKEEPER. Never mind your loves. What manner of accident was this?

WIFE. The coach was passing Six Mile crossroads, at the brow of the hill where the gibbet stands; and the horsemen half a furlong behind, and Moony with his trap coming down the by-road. There was a great wind on the down, and the footpad—him that was hanged last Michaelmas—was swinging on his chain.

INNKEEPER. Aye, the crows were pecking at him a month since.

WIFE. When the coach was nearing the gibbet comes a gust fit to blow Moony from his seat, so he says, and the footpad—or his bag of bones—swings right out above the road. The near horse shies and breaks a trace, the other rears, the driver pitches from his seat, then the coach sets off at a gallop down the hill towards the bridge in the Bottom.

INNKEEPER. God save us! With the lady inside—and the bend in the road——

WIFE. And the cliff this side of the stream! Oh, my heart stopped beating when I heard the tale!

INNKEEPER. What then?

WIFE. While Moony was pulling the driver to his feet the two horsemen passed them at a clatter. The coach was out of sight, the riders after it. When they came into view at the bridge there was a long stone's throw still between them.

INNKEEPER [*mopping his brow*]. God save us!

WIFE. The rise should have stopped the pair, but they breasted it at a gallop, with the others gaining on them, neck and neck behind.

INNKEEPER. Good, good!

WIFE. Into the dip they went, with the coach twisting like a scotched snake across the roadway; but next they saw the gentleman's horse at the hind-wheels on the off side, while his servant came through on the near side, where the rocks overhang.

INNKEEPER. Well done!

WIFE. Every minute they thought to see one of the pair crushed and thrown, but close on the bend they saw the gentleman reaching for the bridle of the off horse, and his servant reaching for the other, and both standing high in the stirrups to get a purchase on the runaways.

INNKEEPER. And then?

WIFE. Still the crazy creatures went on at a gallop, but the riders worked over to take the bit in hand, and so they brought them to a standstill, not ten paces too soon, with the lady and her woman safe but for a shaking. Ten minutes later up comes Moony, and finds the horses all of a snow lather, with the servant looking to their shoes, and the maid in a dead faint, and the gentleman standing as cool as may be, passing compliments with her mistress. Oh, I love bravery in a man!

INNKEEPER. It should be a three days' bill, with all their horses lame. Which rooms did you make ready?

WIFE. The two best bedrooms on the first landing.

INNKEEPER. Hum. I would have put them farther apart. This is what the quality call a romance.

WIFE. And why not? We have no call to meddle with the pleasures of the quality.

INNKEEPER. That's as may be, but I would have bedded them farther apart. These romances are here to-day and gone to-morrow. Set them too close for a night, and at dawn your fine gentleman is calling for his boots, while your fine lady sobs on her pillow.

WIFE. That's not the way of true love.

INNKEEPER. True love, true love! Mercy on us! 'Tis the way of gentlemen, mark my words. Lay them well apart, let them dangle, and we have them here this day week. Now the servant and the maid are another tale. Bed them as close as you please.

WIFE. Indeed I will not! I'll have no goings-on in this house.

INNKEEPER. Why, they will hold the others fast. Trust servants for that. I was in service myself—and you too, once on a time. [*Pinching her*] We know the ways of true love, eh?

WIFE. For shame on you!

INNKEEPER. Well, well, a woman always knows best. Here they come. Quickly, my apron!

[*He goes out. His* WIFE *busies herself in the room. Commotion in the inn courtyard. Enter the* LADY *and her* MAID, *and*

*after them the* NOBLEMAN, *his* MAN, *and the* INNKEEPER *bowing. The* WIFE *curtseys deeply.*

Good evening to your honour.

MAN [*correcting him*]. Your lordship.

NOBLEMAN [*to* MAN]. Let him bring the best Madeira in his cellar.

INNKEEPER. A welcome to your lordship. We heard of the accident to my lady's coach, and your lordship's bravery——

NOBLEMAN [*to* MAN]. Is this the innkeeper?

MAN. It is, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Then let him bring his wine. [*Exit* INNKEEPER.

WIFE. I hope your ladyship feels no ill-effects from the shaking?

LADY. I thank you, no. My maid suffered more, but is now recovered. It was a trifle, thanks to the happy arrival of these—these gentlemen.

WIFE. Happy indeed, my lady. Oh, I love bravery in a man [*looking at the* MAN], whoe'er he be!

LADY. And I too.

NOBLEMAN. Still, madam, the virtue becomes a woman best.

LADY. *The* virtue, my lord, or virtue?

NOBLEMAN. Courage is the only virtue, wise men tell us.

LADY [*laughing*]. Then my maid is a sad rogue. But we must leave you to your Madeira, and thank our rescuers once again. You, my lord. [*To the* MAN] And you also, sir. [*The* MAN *bows.*

WIFE. This way, my lady. Ours is only a wayside inn, but your ladyship will not look for a palace.

LADY. A palace? No, indeed. Your attic will be welcome.

[*The* LADY *and her* MAID *are lighted up the stairs. The* NOBLEMAN *and the* MAN *alone—the* MAN *at the foot of the stairs, looking upward.*

NOBLEMAN. Yes, Charles, they are gone for the present. Will you now stoop to mundane matters? Loosen my boots, if you please. [*The* MAN *loosens his boots.*] So there's adventure, Charles—the edge of life, the day's reward. Who would have guessed our fate this morning? Two nodding horses, two nodding horsemen, and the fortune of the road. How many milestones have I passed to-day—and each of them the grave of an hour lost in travelling! How many crazy loads of hay, and rosy farmers in their market-carts, and great full-bellied corn-stacks, and feathered elms like striding cockerels! I was sick of meadowsweet and buttercups, I was surfeited with rich acres. The world is very coarse: Nature disgusts me. And yet our poets sing of her! This strapping wench, this milkmaid of a goddess, all breasts and fruition! A clownish taste. You spoke, Charles?

MAN. My lord, I had nothing to say.

NOBLEMAN. A vain apology for silence. You compel me to con-

inue. I fell asleep as I rode, to the music of some mill-wheel grinding ottage flour, and dreamed of the pleasures of the mind. A collector's leasures, my Charles. Suddenly, at the fall of dusk, comes adventure. A clatter and a cry, a race that might have been the envy of Newnarket, a tussle and a halt, and Beauty smiles her thanks. The candles beckon, supper is prepared. Yes, there's adventure. But I am old in these romantic arts; they stir the mind more than the pulse. Adventure must be held in delicate fingers. It should be handled, not embraced. It should be sipped, not swallowed at a gulp.

[*The* INNKEEPER *returning offers wine.*

So here's a toast to prudence—to the soldier with a pair of heels, to the mind that lives when passions die. Prudence, Charles. To that virtue I would empty a tumbler.

[*He drinks and flings away his glass.*

INNKEEPER. I hope the Madeira is to your lordship's taste?

NOBLEMAN [*to the* MAN]. Is this the innkeeper?

MAN. It is, my lord.

NOBLEMAN [*considering him*]. Your wine, like your person, is the soul of mediocrity.

INNKEEPER [*flattered*]. Your lordship is too kind.

NOBLEMAN. It is the half-way house between physic and cordial. Still, it may serve to lay the dust of travel.

INNKEEPER. I humbly thank your lordship.

NOBLEMAN. You may leave us. At supper we shall look for better things.

INNKEEPER [*bowing himself out*]. Your lordship shall have the best a poor house can offer.

NOBLEMAN. Stay. My servant here is my companion. Use him well.

INNKEEPER. I will, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. None of your scullery entertainment. He will wait on me at all hours. He is the last survivor of his race—the breed of Fools. Also he is my confessor, and lends me the comfort of philosophy.

INNKEEPER. Ha, ha! Your lordship is pleased to make merry. But you will have pleasanter company this evening—a deal pleasanter, I'll be bound. Well, well, no harm in that, say I. There's a time for everything. I was young myself once. Ha, ha! Youth will be served. Ha, ha!

NOBLEMAN [*to his* MAN]. Charles!

MAN. My lord?

NOBLEMAN. Remove this creature from my presence.

[*Exeunt* INNKEEPER, *and the* MAN *bundling him out. The* NOBLEMAN, *alone, sits in a high-backed chair. At the head of the stairs appears the* MAID, *carrying a pitcher.*

*She descends without seeing him. He watches her for a moment, then moves softly.*

MAID [*with a start, making him a curtsey*]. Your pardon, sir—my lord, I mean. I was fetching warm water for my lady.

NOBLEMAN. My lady can wait awhile. Set down the pitcher. [*She does so.*] Come to me. [*She approaches.*] It was a pretty swoon—as pretty as ever I saw. A portrait of surrender, in the pose that suits a woman best. [*She drops her eyes.*] And what did you dream in that pretty swoon?

MAID. Oh, my lord——

NOBLEMAN. Give me your hand. [*She obeys, and he puts money in it.*] There. Are we better friends?

MAID [*with another curtsey*]. Much better, indeed, my lord. But I should tell you that my lady——

NOBLEMAN. Well, pretty one?

MAID. My lord will find my lady hard to please.

NOBLEMAN. Your lady is the most unapproachable of ladies? Is that your meaning?

MAID. Indeed, yes. And many gentlemen have found her so.

NOBLEMAN [*amused*]. But some gentlemen, no doubt, have found her otherwise?

MAID. Perhaps—one here and there, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. One here and there. This conquest should be tempting. But you think my chances poor?

MAID [*fingering his coin*]. My lord is generous, but——

NOBLEMAN. You hold out no hopes. Honest baggage! No matter; you may keep the bribe.

MAID. Thank you, my lord.

NOBLEMAN [*beckoning her closer*]. But tell me, who spoke of your mistress? Not I. We spoke of a runaway coach and a pretty swooning maid.

MAID. Oh, my lord——!

NOBLEMAN. For that matter, I have a servant. A monkish sort of fellow, a philosopher—but he has eyes in his head. If they should light upon you, then he and I might fall out.

MAID. Oh, fie, my lord! [*Escaping his arms*] I know my place.

NOBLEMAN. Good. It is the art of life to know it. [*A silence.*] But have we not all met before to-day? At Bath, I think?

MAID. Your lordship moves in the best houses.

NOBLEMAN. Like her ladyship. We have met more than once. And where, I wonder? Was it not in the best house of all, in the Royal Crescent, from which my lady has just run away as fast as her coach would carry her?

MAID. You know too much, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. I have eyes in my head, too. I know that ladies do not take the road for pleasure at two o'clock of a summer's morning.

MAID. I must go to my lady——

NOBLEMAN. Come, it is no hanging matter to run away from a man, even though he be a prince. The woman who runs will never lack followers.

MAID. Oh, if my lady could hear you, she would fly into a rage!

NOBLEMAN. A woman of spirit, eh? A passionate nature. But this is for your ears only, my pretty one. I think you can keep secrets.

MAID. I am afraid of men who know too much.

NOBLEMAN. You can trust me. Tell me now—do you love your mistress?

MAID. I know my place, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. But do you love her?

MAID [*with an outburst*]. I hate her! I hate her, with her pride and her spirit and her smiling ways! But for you, my lord, we should both have been lying in a ditch with the coach atop of us. And all because she fell out with her prince. A lovers' quarrel, and she thought herself insulted. A prince, too.

NOBLEMAN. *The* Prince, my girl. The world of difference.

MAID. As open-handed a gentleman as ever stepped.

NOBLEMAN. Not to say open-hearted.

MAID. That's as may be. A gentleman of his rank——

NOBLEMAN. Cannot be blamed for it. You should be a lady-in-waiting, if we all had our rights.

MAID. Oh, my lord, you understand indeed!

NOBLEMAN And did the Prince's eyes ever light on your pretty face?

MAID [*blushing*]. Perhaps, my lord. But not a word to my lady.

NOBLEMAN. I am your friend. [*Amused.*] We plumb new depths of infamy.

MAID. It was a fine life at Bath, with dinners and suppers as many as you please, and the Italian singers at the playhouse, and a servants' ball every week. And to give it all up, to flounce out of the house without so much as a farewell, and half our baggage left behind; to sit cramped in a coach to count the milestones on the road——

NOBLEMAN. Aha!

MAID. —to risk sudden death at every turning, but for the mercy of a gentleman like you to save us from it; to live in common inns and lodgings; then more coaches and more travels, and no place to call our own! But it was always so. Last year nothing would content my lady but she should visit Tuscany—to see the churches and the pictures, if you please! We jogged all the way to Florence, but for the crossing in the packet—ugh! And those foreigners and their ways!

NOBLEMAN. I know them, and their pictures.

MAID. Yes, I hate her, and yet——

NOBLEMAN. As long as she runs from men, you will run too, in the hope of capture.

MAID. Hush! I heard——

LADY'S VOICE [*calling*]. Louise!

MAID. Coming, my lady!

NOBLEMAN [*lifting a warning forefinger*]. Not a whisper!

MAID. Trust me for that, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. You and I will meet again. [*As she mounts the stairs.*] If my man hates me as much, we are well matched. [*Enter the* MAN.] Well, Charles? Fresh from the stable?

MAN. The mare has a saddle-gall, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Careless creature. And your own mount?

MAN. A jar and some bruises. Scarcely fit to ride.

NOBLEMAN. The coach-horses are lame, no doubt?

MAN. Dead lame, my lord, so they tell me.

NOBLEMAN. Then we are tethered here for some days. We have time to think. Come, Charles. You and I will make no mysteries with each other. We know who these adventurous ladies are. I will call the maid a lady in compliment to you. [*The* MAN *is silent.*] Answer me—you know them?

MAN. Your lordship knows best.

NOBLEMAN. And you have guessed that our meeting was not altogether by chance?

MAN. I think even your lordship did not foresee the accident to the coach.

NOBLEMAN. No, the gallows-bird did us a good turn. My blessing on him! He lent us the appearance of gallant rescuers. This is a world of appearance, Charles.

MAN. I know it, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Women have a weakness for a rescuer. And indeed you played your part manfully.

MAN. The least I could do was to follow your lordship's example.

NOBLEMAN. It is seldom that we can obtain so much credit for so slight a service. Let us make the most of it.

MAN. We will, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Now this coach may have other pursuers. No hue and cry, you understand, no scouring of the countryside, but it may be followed. There is one person in particular to be reckoned with—let us say a very exalted person, who cannot ride a mile, but possesses a good pair of greys. You take me?

MAN. I take your lordship's word.

NOBLEMAN. I have no mind to be disturbed in this sanctuary, which

pleases me well. It is less troublesome to be passed than overtaken. This follower must be misdirected. Should he pass this way, you will command the innkeeper to deny all knowledge of a coach, or ladies, or an accident. You will post one or two stout fellows—yokels of these parts, the stupider the better—to keep watch on the road and tell the same story. Bribe them handsomely; take my purse. See to it now, and return.

MAN [*motionless*]. This inn lies on a by-road, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Well, what of it?

MAN. The place to watch is the turning from the main road, three miles distant.

NOBLEMAN. True. I should have thought of that. Despatch a man to this spot immediately.

MAN. I took the liberty an hour ago of carrying out your lordship's wishes.

NOBLEMAN. The devil you did! And how, may I ask?

MAN. I sent the man they call Moony Dick, who came up in his trap after the accident. He will wait at the crossroads—all night if need be. He will direct the traveller you speak of to follow the coach by the highway to Oxford.

NOBLEMAN. Can you trust this man?

MAN. No, my lord. He will be paid in the morning.

NOBLEMAN. Well done! You are a treasure, Charles. I could almost call you my better self.

MAN. Your lordship flatters me.

NOBLEMAN. No, no. Every thought foreseen, every wish gratified. But it seems to me that you had your own reasons for such foresight. Come, confess. You had your eye on the maid. A shapely baggage.

MAN. Your lordship is pleased to be familiar.

NOBLEMAN. A vice in masters not to be encouraged, eh? But between ourselves, Charles, she is unworthy of you. A pretty face, an empty head. Three minutes' conversation and the well is dry. You should look elsewhere.

MAN [*with gentle irony*]. I am sorry your lordship would deprive a menial of his pleasures.

NOBLEMAN. Come, Charles, you know I can deny you nothing. If you are set upon her, then take her—always providing that she will have you. For we must consult their wishes, eh?

MAN. My lord is the soul of chivalry.

NOBLEMAN. I gave you the hint for your own sake.

MAN. I understood your lordship perfectly.

NOBLEMAN. For my part, you know that my thoughts are centred on her mistress. [*The* MAN *watches him narrowly.*] This woman interests me. She has a will of her own.

MAN [*with a movement to withdraw*]. I should not discuss my lady with your lordship.

NOBLEMAN. My admirable Charles! I vow you have the scruples of a gentleman. That reminds me that I have a question to ask you. We are cooped in this inn, and I cannot send you packing if I would. You may answer freely.

MAN. My lord?

NOBLEMAN. How well, Charles, do you hate me? [*A silence.*

MAN. I have given your lordship no grounds to suppose——

NOBLEMAN. None of your quibbles. The more you hate me the better it will suit my purpose. Speak your mind.

MAN. My mind is not your lordship's to command.

NOBLEMAN. True. I am asking a favour.

MAN. Since you ask me—I think no man is good enough to be another man's servant.

NOBLEMAN. Or another man's master, you would say. I feel the sting in the tail, Charles. Then why do you remain with me? Answer! Have no fear!

MAN. I have no fear.

NOBLEMAN. Answer!

MAN. I watch the world, as my lord watches it.

NOBLEMAN. But you see it otherwise?

MAN. We see what is in ourselves. We serve what is in our nature.

NOBLEMAN. Good. You have answered well. So you spy upon this fashionable world you detest?

MAN. Spy is an ugly word, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. You observe its mummeries for your own ends. You hope that this order will one day crumble, as it has crumbled already in France. You are a leveller, Charles. You are a Jacobin. Deny it if you can.

MAN. I deny nothing, my lord. But I make bold to ask why you keep me in your service?

NOBLEMAN. I have a use for levellers, Charles. I have a use for the hatred of your betters that surges in your heart. It gives me entertainment.

MAN. Then we are both content, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. No doubt your plebeian scorn embraces all of us? I am sure it includes the lady who is at present decking herself out in her finery to sup with me?

MAN [*impassive*]. Your lordship knows me too well.

NOBLEMAN. A butterfly of fashion, Charles, a gilded plaything, a pretty parasite, a prince's mistress. Could any creature arouse a fiercer passion in the people's breast? Well, you shall have your satisfaction. You shall see her humbled. You shall even assist at the ceremony.

MAN. I, my lord?

NOBLEMAN. All in good time, my Jacobin. Curb your frenzy for the tumbrils. I have a mind to send her back to her prince.

MAN [*involuntarily*]. That would be——

NOBLEMAN. Magnificent, would it not? A noble gesture. He has won my money; we were together at the tables on the evening when she fled. The Prince smiled and smiled when they laid her note at his elbow. He was deep in liquor—still winning at every throw. I slipped away with an empty purse, to be replenished in London. Well, the money is lost, but one can still be generous. It would please me to return him his runaway.

MAN. Then why, my lord——

NOBLEMAN. Why put him on a false scent, you ask? *Finesse*, my Charles, *finesse*—a thing that your guillotine fails to appreciate. We must not move too soon. Let him run on his wild-goose chase as far as Oxford, till his blood is up. Let her rest here for a night or two. And then let me send her back to him with a card and my compliments —a trifle blown upon, just enough to make him wonder whether he is sprouting horns or no. Yes, a graceful gesture.

MAN. And if my lady will not go?

NOBLEMAN. There are ways and means of persuading her. Under a cloak of conveying her to a safe refuge we can run her slap into his arms. And you, my Charles, shall be her escort. That will lend irony to the stroke. We will despatch her like a nosegay in a lackey's hand. The prospect pleases you?

MAN. I think, my lord, you hate this lady even more than I do.

NOBLEMAN. No, Charles. Moderation in all things; I am no Jacobin, but a mild reformer. I have no great love for these women who slip the collar. Too many of them would endanger the State. They should be taught a lesson. [*Rising*] So you will do my errand? I can rely upon you?

MAN. As on your lordship's better self.

NOBLEMAN. Then I will make ready for supper. We must preserve the semblance of gallantry with our runaways. They also have their pride, no doubt. [*Turning at the foot of the stairs.*

MAN. As much, my lord, as we shall leave them.

NOBLEMAN [*on the stairs*]. Ha, ha! As much as we shall leave them. Ha, ha! Excellent fellow!

[*Exit the* NOBLEMAN. *The* MAN *remains alone*

MAN. A world of appearance, says my lord—a painted mockery. Brave men, gay women—these are masks and shadows. Green trees, young shoots, high nests for crows—whispers, fancies. Bright mornings, quiver of the sunlight, falling dusk—darkness and dreams. This is an earth that men have made. Our stench corrupts the meadows,

and the cattle hold their breath. This is an earth that men have made. All is appearance, says my lord, and smiles again—the smile that freezes laughter. If we are false, what can be true? And yet the folded leaf will open to the sun. The tallest tree will cast the longest shadow. [*Drawing himself up*] The longest shadow is reality.

[*The* LADY *descends the stairs, and the* INNKEEPER *and his* WIFE *enter from the other side with trays and platters. They hand their dishes silently to the* MAN, *who sets the table. The* LADY *seats herself and looks on.*

INNKEEPER [*to the* MAN]. The wine is good. My father laid it down. I have kept a drop for you in the kitchen.

MAN [*considering the table*]. Something has been forgotten. Yes. Bring flowers.

WIFE. Flowers, sir?

MAN. A bowl of roses. This is June. His lordship will expect them.

INNKEEPER [*scratching his head*]. And the garden all in darkness——

MAN. Take a lantern, both of you. Go!

INNKEEPER [*going out*]. A lantern, wife!

[MAN *and* LADY *alone. The* LADY *laughs softly.*

MAN. Your ladyship laughed?

LADY. I thought of the poor creatures plucking roses by lantern-light. The drollery of common things!

MAN [*setting glasses*]. Your ladyship means—of common creatures.

LADY. No. We are all common, and only some of us are droll. [*A silence.*] While we are alone, I have to thank you once again for this evening's service. You are a gallant man.

MAN. It was a trifle. My master led the way.

LADY. Perhaps that is true, but one looks for gallantry in gentlemen. It is their profession, so to speak. A poor man's chivalry is a flower. Have you been a soldier?

MAN. I am a soldier out of love with wars, my lady.

LADY. You served in France? [MAN *bows.*] No wonder. I will offer you no money.

MAN. Your ladyship honours me.

LADY. If the question is not impertinent, why did you choose this trade of all trades?

MAN. It is a trade like any other.

LADY. You see the world, it is true.

MAN. I have eyes and ears, my lady.

LADY. And a heart? [*He turns to her.*] That is the first thing—to have a heart. I thought—it seemed to me that you——

MAN. My lady?

LADY. I think I need a friend in this house. [*A silence.*

MAN. Your ladyship has friends elsewhere.

LADY. But not here?

MAN. That is not for me to say.

LADY. I am in a trap, it seems. Oh, not of your setting, perhaps of no one's setting, but a trap. I feel it. Will you help me out?

MAN. My lady's horses are lame. This is not a post-house.

LADY. I can ride if need be.

MAN. We have no mounts ourselves.

LADY. I can walk to the next inn.

MAN. Twelve miles, my lady. The night is dark, but the door is on the latch.

LADY [*rising*]. Then you are not disposed to help me? I was mistaken in you? [*He seems to bar her way.*] Be good enough to stand aside.

MAN. There are highwaymen in these parts. One of them swung on the gibbet across your road.

LADY. That was the unhappy occasion of our meeting. I shall not forget it—this skeleton haunts me still. That men can be so barbarous!

MAN. If my lady fears that she may be followed from Bath, I can tell her that the danger is past.

LADY [*with spirit*]. *You* can tell me?

MAN. The Prince's coach has been directed by the highroad to Oxford.

LADY. Misdirected?

MAN. As my lady pleases.

LADY. Who has done this? Who are you, sir?

MAN. I am a friend.

LADY. Have I a friend? I must take it on trust, for plainly you know me.

MAN. I know you better than I know myself.

LADY. Here are deep waters indeed. I do not remember your face.

MAN. It is five years since my lady was a singer at Covent Garden Playhouse.

LADY. And you were——?

MAN. I was one of the gallery.

LADY. The gallery to whom I sang. [*With a smile*] So I meet with an unknown admirer?

MAN. Those are empty words.

LADY. True. Those are empty words. I think, sir, you are not an admirer.

MAN. I am a friend.

LADY. Only five years, can it be? It seems half a lifetime. I have travelled far since then. The music has run out of my horses' hoofs.

MAN. It is in the earth, where nothing is lost.

LADY. You speak my thoughts. [*Rising*] Who are you, sir? What is this place?

MAN. It is a simple alehouse called "The Man with a Load of Mischief."

LADY. Another man! God save us, I am weary of them. Oh, I will not play the weak woman with you. The pretence of weakness is our hypocrisy. Frailty is a pretty word to please our masters. [*A silence.*] So the Prince takes the wrong turning—outriders, coach and all?

MAN. He will pass in the night.

LADY. Outriders, coach and all. There's a chapter closed. Put not your trust in princes. [*A silence.*] You know that I was his mistress?

MAN. So much every one knows

LADY. Ask me why I chose that trade of all trades.

MAN. My lady has seen the world.

LADY. A sort of world. Too many fops and their tailors, too few men. Too many wits and too little honesty. Too many bottles and too little entertainment. A lackey's Paradise.

MAN. My lady speaks to a lackey.

LADY. Then I ask your pardon. A nobleman's Paradise. A dung-hill sprouting sword-grass, a hedgerow rank with lords and ladies. No fruitful earth.

MAN. The world is as we make it.

LADY. Have we made that? I think that you and I are in league against our betters.

MAN. My lady must speak for herself.

LADY. Oh, my friend, no more of my lady! And no more talk of what is dead and done with. Our wits were given us to hide our hearts. [*A silence.*] Now I have spoken too freely. Your Man with a Load of Mischief carries a gun on his shoulder.

MAN. It will not go off unless you fear him.

LADY. I fear nothing, but I have more pride than you suppose.

MAN. I understand. Your ladyship forgot for a moment that you were speaking with a servant.

LADY. Believe me, I trust you.

MAN. Good servants are made to be trusted. Trust is less than I ask.

LADY. You are proud too. I should have known it. Listen——

MAN. My lord is coming.

LADY. That man!

[*Re-enter the* NOBLEMAN, *and from the other side the* INNKEEPER *and his* WIFE, *bringing their bowl of roses. The* MAN *assists them at the table. The* NOBLEMAN *crosses over to where the* LADY *is seated.*

NOBLEMAN. So, madam, you will sup with me. This is an honour indeed.

LADY. Call it rather the payment of a debt, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. To a man whose debts are unpaid, your integrity is overwhelming. Such obligations are made to be forgotten.

LADY. Always excepting debts of honour?

NOBLEMAN. We pay those from necessity. The bailiffs are on the spot.

LADY. And our supper on the table. Well, hunger spells necessity. I am famished. [*During the foregoing the* MAID *has descended.*

NOBLEMAN. Is all ready, Charles?

MAN. My lord and my lady, supper is served.

[*The* NOBLEMAN *and the* LADY *seat themselves at the table, the* MAN *and the* MAID *taking post behind their chairs.*

LADY. It was thoughtful of you, my lord, to choose these flowers.

NOBLEMAN [*indifferently*]. The roses? Ah, to be sure. They are in season.

LADY. By your leave, I will take one of them.

## ACT II

*Supper is ended. The* NOBLEMAN *and the* LADY *sit at the table, with their servants behind them, as before. The dishes are removed as the scene proceeds.*

NOBLEMAN [*in the middle of a speech*]. Yet, madam, there is this to be said—— [*The* INNKEEPER *and his* WIFE *approach.*] What have you there?

WIFE. A dish of early strawberries, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Innocent fruit! They shall be dipped in wine. [*With a motion to place them before the* LADY] Madam?

LADY [*to the* WIFE]. I will take cream, if you please.

NOBLEMAN. Berries and cream—a marriage of the innocents. Indeed a massacre, to any palate of distinction. [*A silence.*

LADY. I think, when we were interrupted, you were singing the praises of the dice.

NOBLEMAN. Ah, yes. There is this to be said for the passion of gaming, that it improves the loser's character out of knowledge.

LADY [*laughing*]. Oh!

NOBLEMAN. A man never feels so virtuous as the morning after he has lost his money at the tables His purse is not so light as his

conscience. All manner of fine thoughts and noble sentiments come into his mind. I have known poems to be written, or at least conceived, on such an occasion. I have known confirmed cynics turn into Nature-worshippers, like my servant here, as they pulled up their window-blinds to let in the sun. I have known men resolve to give up the dice for ever, and at least one who held to the resolution for a week.

LADY. He was a hero indeed.

NOBLEMAN. I have even known men determine to end their lives forthwith at the pistol's point, which was the most honourable decision they could make, besides being the best service they could render to their fellows.

LADY [*suddenly grave*]. And you have known some who carried it out, perhaps?

NOBLEMAN. One or two, madam. Their souls rest in the gamesters' Paradise. The rest were the prey of human weakness. To leave the world gracefully requires spirit as well as breeding.

LADY. It is never easy to break with the past. Still harder to break with oneself.

NOBLEMAN. And so upon the whole it is better not to try.

LADY. You think so, my lord?

NOBLEMAN. We should accept our fortunes as we wear our clothes; they are made to measure and fit us tolerably well. [*Drinking*] But if virtue must be encouraged, give me the green tables.

LADY. Your path to reform is rough, my lord, and looks none too safe. We women must beware of it. Is there no means less drastic by which we may reach the state of contentment? I doubt if our purses are long enough to run your way.

NOBLEMAN [*drinking*]. They can always be lengthened.

LADY. By our generous masters, true. But how shall we be sure of their generosity? It seems that you are not a believer in the goodness of human nature.

NOBLEMAN [*setting down his glass again*]. Perhaps, madam, you have heard of the Renaissance? I would not weary you, but it may be the name has met your ears.

LADY. Do you mean the Revival of Learning?

NOBLEMAN. The revival of ignorance, madam. The return of black superstition.

LADY. But one had always supposed——

NOBLEMAN. The grand discovery of the Renaissance—if we are to call it a discovery—was the goodness of man. The prime delusion. The new Serpent in Eden. Since that sop was thrown to man's conceit the creature has strutted in his garden like a peacock on holiday. Whatever may be wrong, he is right. Whatever may be bad, he is good. He has spread a tail of fine feathers that he calls his humanity,

and grows insufferable. Order went out of the world when the thought of human goodness came into it.

LADY. So you would have us acknowledge our baseness, my lord?

NOBLEMAN. It is the least we can do.

LADY. For my part, I am ready to make confession. But I miss the Jesuit chaplain who should run at your lordship's heels.

NOBLEMAN [*turning to the* MAN]. Here is—but no. Unhappily I carry a heretic about with me.

LADY [*with a smile*]. Then even your lordship lives above your principles.

NOBLEMAN. I keep him to convince me of their soundness. Eh, Charles?

MAN [*impassive*]. Your lordship knows best.

NOBLEMAN. He is of the opposite camp, and a good enemy. You know, madam, that men reason to strengthen their own prejudices, and not to disturb their adversary's convictions.

LADY. I have often suspected as much in listening to an argument.

NOBLEMAN. My man has never yet agreed with me. On the day when we cease to fall out I shall dismiss him. He satisfies a craving inbred in us, the wrestler's instinct. A heart of oak, a spirit of steel.

LADY. We learn more of men every day. I blush to confess that my maid agrees with me on all occasions.

NOBLEMAN. It is no more than her duty, madam. Women——

LADY. Women are not wrestlers. No, my lord. They are the prize, as we are often told.

NOBLEMAN. A prize worth many a bout.

LADY [*rising*]. Oh, my lords and masters! Your world of compliments, your world of artifice, your world of sense and instinct!

NOBLEMAN. It is the world we know, madam. The rest is guesswork.

LADY. The rest is dreaming. Do you never dream, my lord?

NOBLEMAN. Indeed, most pleasantly. Of such an inn as this, and such a supper-table of the wits. The painted sign swings in the wind above the eaves, the lamps are lighted, and around us flicker shadows of ourselves. [*Turning to find the* MAN *at his elbow*] Something too solid, perhaps.

LADY. There stands a spinet. Shall we make music to clear the air of such philosophy?

NOBLEMAN. By all means, Charles, you shall give us a song.

MAN. My lord——

LADY [*turning to him*]. Do you sing, sir?

NOBLEMAN. As the thrush warbles.

MAN. My lord, I would not——

NOBLEMAN. But you shall.

LADY. Pray do not press him, my lord. I will sing for him.

NOBLEMAN. Madam, you are too kind. The fellow is stubborn.

LADY. To sing for others is nothing new to me.

[*The* MAN *opens the spinet for her.*

*Song*

LADY. "I have the flaunting air, she said,
Laughing remorse away
For vanities that now are dead,
Dear follies of a day.

Like a great golden ship she rode,
Capricious at her ease,
Spreading a sail to catch the mode
Of every idle breeze.

A dancing cloak she wore above
Her pale serenity:
O lamp of faith, O light o' love,
Which was more dear to me?"

NOBLEMAN. It is an excellent song, but I do not remember hearing the words before.

LADY. They were made for an occasion that your lordship has not foreseen.

NOBLEMAN. Indeed. And now we must keep our followers no longer from their supper. The kitchen yawns for them.

LADY [*to her* MAID]. You may go, Louise.

NOBLEMAN [*to his* MAN]. And you, Charles.

[*Exeunt* MAID *and* MAN. *The* NOBLEMAN *and the* LADY *alone.*

LADY. I wish to be frank with you, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. I am honoured to deserve such a confidence.

LADY. I think you followed me from Bath.

NOBLEMAN. I set out on the same night as your ladyship.

LADY. In the small hours of the morning.

NOBLEMAN [*drinking*]. It happened that the hour was early.

LADY. Happened!

NOBLEMAN. The road to London is open to all travellers who pay the tolls.

LADY. And some of them, it seems, must pay heavily.

NOBLEMAN. Those are the drawbacks of travel.

LADY. You are the Prince's friend, I think?

NOBLEMAN. Many friendships have been lost by being claimed. Let us say an acquaintance.

LADY. At least you are his companion at the tables, for he has spoken of you

NOBLEMAN [*drinking*]. Favourably, I trust?

LADY. He called you a good loser.

NOBLEMAN. His Highness has the best of reasons for knowing that.

LADY. You followed me unknown to him, with a purpose of your own. What was that purpose?

NOBLEMAN [*gallantly*]. Need we look far for the answer?

LADY. Farther than this room, my lord, or the accident that brought us together, or your evident courage as a horseman. You and I are no friends. We need not play at love-making.

NOBLEMAN. I protest——

LADY. We need not play at love-making, my lord. Fine words and good manners, if you will. Fine thoughts and handsome sentiments, as many as you please. But there is no love lost between us.

NOBLEMAN [*in admiration*]. You are a woman of spirit. I could almost——

LADY. You could almost covet the thing you do not desire, which is myself.

NOBLEMAN. Hard words.

LADY. Hard thoughts, my lord. Now, why did you follow me?

NOBLEMAN. There is a code of honour that imposes silence in such affairs.

LADY. I have heard of it. A man's code. It decrees that women shall not be spoken of, but only marketed.

NOBLEMAN. Protected, madam.

LADY. Protected, if you like it better. A man's code, with one chief commandment.

NOBLEMAN. And that is?

LADY. Thou shalt not be made a laughing-stock.

NOBLEMAN. Excellent.

LADY. A runaway wife makes a fool of her husband. A runaway mistress makes her lover farcical. On such occasions men put their heads together, solemn as church owls, and mumble their precious code of honour. I know, my lord. While women curtsey to them and thank them for their chivalry.

NOBLEMAN. Is this a war of the sexes?

LADY. And what if it be? Oh, I am not one of the wives who sit and wait for favours! Or even one of the mistresses who aspire to be wives, with one hand on their deed of settlement and the other on the cradle. You need not trouble to protect my name. When I give I give all for nothing. I am free of your property laws.

NOBLEMAN. Yet the fortunate man who has once pleased you has his pride to consider.

LADY. The Prince, you mean?

NOBLEMAN. I am naming no names.

LADY. Let him consider it. I will give him leisure enough and to spare.

NOBLEMAN. You parted abruptly. Even noticeably.

LADY. And how should we part? Am I to wait until I am forty, to be pensioned off and receive a lodge in a royal park, where I shall keep spaniels and subscribe to the charities? Thank you! I leave that to your gentlewomen, who have so far forgotten their dignity as to toy with a lover. I am plain woman, and will make my own way in life.

NOBLEMAN. There are some ways that would certainly be inconvenient.

LADY. For instance?

NOBLEMAN. For instance, if you should return to the public stage.

LADY. You think I should not be popular?

NOBLEMAN [*drinking*]. On the contrary, madam. Too popular.

LADY. And why, pray?

NOBLEMAN. Your affairs, I think, are common knowledge.

LADY. I have noticed that the more pains men give themselves to shield a woman's name, the more widely her affairs are known.

NOBLEMAN. For that we are indebted to your sex rather than ours.

LADY. And if I should defy the ban, and return to my profession?

NOBLEMAN. Then, madam, a means would be found of preventing you. The playhouses are not uncontrolled.

LADY. Would you rob me of a living?

NOBLEMAN. We should reluctantly deprive the public of a scandal.

LADY. "We," my lord?

NOBLEMAN. I venture to speak in the name of the Court.

LADY. So I am to consider you as an ambassador of the Prince?

NOBLEMAN. An ambassador without credentials.

LADY. Engaged on a mission that is not without risk?

NOBLEMAN. Risk, madam?

LADY. What if his Highness should overtake us here?

NOBLEMAN [*drinking*]. Set your mind at rest. We shall be undisturbed.

LADY. Undisturbed? I begin to understand you. [*A silence.*] You will oblige me, my lord, by ceasing to drink in my company.

NOBLEMAN. This is a common tavern, I think.

LADY. But I am not a common woman.

NOBLEMAN [*raising his eyebrows*]. Indeed?

LADY. You will oblige me, my lord, by sending for your horses and meddling no more with ladies in distress.

NOBLEMAN. You know that my horses are lame.

LADY. I had forgotten it.

NOBLEMAN. They were lamed in your service, madam.

LADY. Your chivalry is faultless.

NOBLEMAN. We must pass the night under this roof. It is better to be friends.

LADY. Friends! You dare to speak of friendship! You, of all the fops and toadies who corrupt the world! You, the philosopher of the green tables! You, the spirit of intelligence among your dicing, drinking, lecherous set! You, the pimp of fashion! You, the cold heart of debauchery! You speak of friendship! It is from you, and men like you, that I have fled. Every leaf of every tree is more companionable. We pass the night under this roof, it is true. But beware, my lord, how you seek to dispose of me. I will not return at any man's bidding. Already I am free. Search for runaway wives, if you will, but let me take my own road. Go back to your prince and tell him what I have said.

NOBLEMAN [*coolly*]. A pretty outburst, madam. I vow that indignation suits you very well. It gives complexion to your native breeding.

LADY. My breeding is not yours, my lord. Nor is my destiny. When I set out from Bath I left the comedy of manners behind me. We are strangers to each other. I am a woman you have never known.

NOBLEMAN. I believe you are still a woman of sense.

LADY. You thought me a woman of taste, and I have condescended to abuse you like a drab. You thought me a woman of heart, and I have stooped to threaten a dog with a whipping.

NOBLEMAN [*angry*]. Be careful, madam. You are making an enemy.

LADY. We both know how to value an enemy. Good night to you —my lord. [*Exit the* LADY. *The* NOBLEMAN *alone.*

NOBLEMAN [*drinking*]. Vixen! Play-actress! But a creature of spirit, worth a man's taming. Would it have been wiser to make love to her?—No, a fool's trick. These spirited women see the game too clearly, and then we are a laughing-stock. Yes, there was a thrust.—Cards on the table are better. Frankness draws them out. They speak their mind.—She stoops to threaten a dog with a whipping, does she? I'll humble her for that. My lady shall eat those words: I'll teach her to stoop. But how?—We must change our tactics. Why not—why not——? I have it! [*Clapping his hands*] Charles! [*Going to the door and calling*] Charles! [*Enter the* MAN.

MAN. My lord?

NOBLEMAN. I have use for you, Charles. High diplomacy—a game after your own heart. You shall play the comedy of your life. Listen. This fine lady has had the effrontery to call me a dog.

MAN. Your lordship is surely mistaken.

NOBLEMAN. No, that very word. Dog!

MAN. Is such ingratitude possible?

NOBLEMAN. It rankles, Charles. We must prepare a revenge to meet the case. I will have proof positive of her stooping. And that is where you will help me.

MAN. I, my lord?

NOBLEMAN. You, my leveller. You, my defender of the rights of man. You shall be her lover.

MAN. I—her lover.

NOBLEMAN. Yes, you shall woo this high-stepping beauty, and bring her to her knees.

MAN. I dare not look so far above me.

NOBLEMAN. Why, man, you have a figure like the rest of us, and a hand to lay on your heart, and the wit to play at honesty. I swear I could believe in you myself.

MAN. It takes two to make love, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. If you are one of them, she will be the other.

MAN. My lady may not be so easy.

NOBLEMAN. I'll answer for her, if you play your hand aright. Who is she, at the best? A common singer who has climbed the back stairs of fortune! And now that I think of it, she looks favourably upon you already. Twice in my presence she has called you "sir"—confound her insolence! Her eyes leer promises. I vow that anyone can have her for the asking.

MAN [*in spite of himself*]. Your lordship speaks too freely of this lady.

NOBLEMAN. Ah! That tone is better. Chivalry, Charles—there's the note to strike. Show her your heart of gold, and she will unbend, never fear. More women are won by bluntness than by guile.

MAN. But a servant——

NOBLEMAN. True, she may have her pride. Show her that you have yours. Stand firm upon the ground of equality.

MAN. And afterwards, my lord?

NOBLEMAN. What! A lover who talks of afterwards!

MAN. I am to be a lover with a purpose.

NOBLEMAN. It will be accomplished when my fine lady eats her dish of humble-pie. Then we shall hear no more of her graces. She will be safely in our hands. I shall be free of her malice, and you—well, you shall not suffer, Charles. We will bring in a bill of indemnity on your account. Name what sum you please. Will you do my errand, or at least attempt it?

MAN. Your lordship asks much of me.

NOBLEMAN. Not more, I hope, than any man can perform.

MAN [*after a silence*]. I am at your lordship's command.

NOBLEMAN. Good. Very good. And now for ways and means.

our divinity has retired to her room. We must have no forcible ntry—none of your plebeian measures.

MAN [*with irony*]. You disappoint me, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Prudence, Charles. These high-steppers require a pair f hands. You will contrive a message and a meeting. The hour is te, the inn is quiet, romance is in the air. The rest I leave to your ıvention.

MAN. Your lordship, I hope, will give me the benefit of your dvice.

NOBLEMAN. Well, a gentle beginning would be best. Play the allant rescuer—that should go well. Then the groom with a soul bove your station—a sure card. Perhaps even the gentleman in dis- uise—if that plot is not too threadbare.

MAN. I would prefer something fresher, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. You may be right. We should avoid the rut. But ympathy, remember. Speak of me—none too kindly, for she hates ne.

MAN. I will not speak ill of your lordship.

NOBLEMAN. Have no scruples. Say your worst.

MAN. Servants often speak ill of their masters. I think that is not he way to my lady's confidence.

NOBLEMAN. A nice point. Yes, you have the finer touch.

MAN. I would rather rely on my own merits than your lordship's hortcomings.

NOBLEMAN. Very shrewd! I am proud of you, Charles.

MAN. Thank you, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. But do not be too respectful. A gentlemanly ardour vill do no harm.

MAN. A manly ardour.

NOBLEMAN. Manly may be better. You have it all at your finger- ips. Why should I presume to instruct you?

MAN. Your lordship's wishes are mine.

NOBLEMAN. Then press the advantage to the end. No half-measures. Do not spare her.

MAN. You will give me time enough——

NOBLEMAN. All night, if you please. I shall be otherwise occupied. While you attempt the mistress, I propose to woo the maid.

MAN. Your lordship at least is taking no risks.

NOBLEMAN. I mention the design for your encouragement.

MAN. It emboldens me to face the worst.

NOBLEMAN. The best, Charles. You will conquer, never fear. Do ve understand each other?

MAN. We do, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Then study your lover's part, for you will play it in an

hour. [MAN *is about to withdraw.*] And send this baggage from th kitchen to her mistress.

[*Exit* MAN. *The* NOBLEMAN *alone, then enter the* MAI

MAID [*with a curtsey, as she crosses to the stairs*]. Your pardon, m lord.

NOBLEMAN. There is my runaway. Well, are you content with you lodging?

MAID. Indeed I am, my lord. If we could meet such gentlemen a you every day——

NOBLEMAN. The burden of travel would not be so troublesom Thank you, pretty one. But there would still be your mistress t please.

MAID. Oh, she may please herself, for all I care!

NOBLEMAN. I have been talking with her. You are happy to hav such a mistress.

MAID. So your lordship may think!

NOBLEMAN. A woman in a thousand. A woman to set men's hea-t on fire.

MAID. That she does well enough!

NOBLEMAN [*deliberately*]. You speak very freely of her.

MAID. Oh, I know my lady!

NOBLEMAN. Still, your tone is saucy.

MAID [*uneasily*]. I hope you did not tell my lady I spoke of her so

NOBLEMAN. I would not betray you.

MAID. Oh, thank you, my lord!

NOBLEMAN [*lifting a forefinger*]. Only watch that tongue of yours my dear. It will get you into trouble.

MAID. I will be careful, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. I believe you will. [*Considering her*] I know one pretty woman finds it hard to praise another.

MAID [*blushing*]. Oh, your lordship!

NOBLEMAN. There, you are safe with me. So this inn pleases you

MAID. Very well, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Even without a follower in sight?

MAID [*glancing at the door*]. Only——

NOBLEMAN. Only my monkish Charles. And tell me, does he temp you?

MAID. No, my lord, but——

NOBLEMAN. But you have a mind to be tempted. Come closer.

[*He whispers in her ear*

MAID. Oh, fie, my lord, fie! What do you take me for?

NOBLEMAN. I take you for a pretty woman who knows how to b discreet. Am I right?

MAID. But——

NOBLEMAN. No buts. My door will be on the latch.
MAID. My lady is sure to guess——
NOBLEMAN. My lady spares no thoughts for you. Are we agreed?
MAID. Perhaps.
NOBLEMAN. Ah!
MAID. I said perhaps.
NOBLEMAN. The word of promise. [*Snatching a kiss from her*] And o—presently!

[*Exit* NOBLEMAN. *The* MAID *alone, then the* MAN *enters, and busies himself in removing glasses from the table.*

MAID [*scornfully*]. Not so much as a look. Fine manners indeed!
MAN [*turning to her*]. Forgive me. My thoughts were gone woolgathering.
MAID. Have you been long in his service?
MAN. Five years.
MAID. I dare say you know more than you would tell.
MAN. We all know that, I hope.
MAID. And more than suits his lordship to be known?
MAN. That my lord could tell you.
MAID [*flashing out*]. Oh, you can keep your secrets, and your gentlemanly airs! I know your sort.
MAN [*quietly*]. My lord is waiting for you.
MAID [*blustering*]. My lady, you mean. Let her wait!
MAN. I mean my lord.
MAID. Oh, for shame! You were listening.
MAN. There was no need to listen.
MAID. These men! But what if I gave him the go-by? What if you should please me better?
MAN. I do not please women.
MAID. So you think, maybe. But ask the women first.
MAN. I will, when the time comes.
MAID. Not yet?
MAN. Not yet.
MAID. I like you, man.
MAN. It is good of you to tell me that.

[*As she comes closer to him, with an air of coquetry, he bends down and kisses her hand.*

MAID. My hand was never kissed before. [*A silence.*] What sort of man are you?
MAN. This glove was left by your lady in her coach. Will you take it to her room as you pass?
MAID. I will say that you sent it.
MAN. You need not.
MAID. But I will. Good night, man.

MAN. Good night, maid.

MAID. Pleasant dreams, man.

[*Exit the* MAID. *The* MAN, *alone, goes to the windows and opens them to the darkness.*

MAN. A woman wished me pleasant dreams. This echo from the stillness—this babble of a sleeping world! On every hand men whisper love. Set ears to earth and hear them murmur: "I love you," "Do you love me?" "You are mine and I am yours." Still they sleep and spin through nothingness. Shall we whisper so—we who have met in the night? Are we sleepwalkers? Shall we march at every passion's call? Shall we weave a pretty cloak of words and kisses? Shall we lift a mask or two of trickery, only to meet another mask behind? It is a mask that brings us face to face. The masks divide, the masks unite, and we are still in darkness. We grope through labyrinths of self, our fingers grasping thorns, our voices echoed by a wall. We seek for hands and not for lips. Oh, mockery of self, give eyes to love, give hands to lovers!

[*The* LADY *appears at the head of the stairs, carrying a lighted candle, and descends.*

LADY. I lay awake. The hours passed, and I began to fear the dawn.

MAN. To-morrow changes everything.

LADY. My maid is not in her room. This inn creaks with misgiving. It is full of stratagems and mysteries. I must know the truth.

MAN. The truth is hidden in ourselves. Go to my lord, and you will find the certainty of stratagems—the outer life. You will find a comedy in the figure of a man. Go to your maid, and ask her why she sells her kisses. You will find a tragedy in a woman's form. Is that world yours? Is that the truth you look for?

LADY. I have come to you.

MAN. Here you will find nothing but riddles buried in our nature. It is better not to dig for them.

LADY. You spoke to me as a friend. I knew that I could trust you.

MAN. Friendship is frankness. Do as I advise.

LADY. And that is?

MAN. Go to your room and sleep. Leave me to guard the buried thoughts. Then we can part to-morrow and still be friends. But if we dig and dig, we shall find corruption underground. We shall come upon your pride and mine, your vanity and mine, your desires and mine—all the scattered bones that moulder in us out of sight. Let them rest.

LADY. I am not afraid of little things.

MAN. But we are both afraid of their littleness.

LADY. I accept all that life offers. I hold out open hands to greet sincerity.

MAN. No one has spoken such words to me before.
LADY. But I speak them.
MAN. The words are yours, the thoughts are mine. [*A silence.*] ou know now that I love you.
LADY. You! But my friend, my friend—that cannot be.
MAN. And why not?
LADY. That cannot be.
MAN. So friendship is one thing, and love another? We find a rrier at the outset. I warned you that it would be so.
LADY. I did not dream of love between us.
MAN. Nor did I dream. I awoke, and it was there. I was alone, d suddenly we were together.
LADY. My friend, I think you speak in earnest.
MAN. And you hold out empty hands to soothe my pride.
LADY. I hold them out to cover my poverty. You honour me too uch.
MAN. Words, words! I know that to say "I love you" is only the ginning of love. Possession itself is only the beginning.
LADY. Believe me, it is often the end.
MAN. The end is in ourselves. The end is fulfilment.
LADY. Every mother fulfils herself. Is that called love?
MAN. Every spring renews the earth.
LADY. The spring may come too late. I have known too many en. Too many arms have held me. I am tired of those arms out-etched, asking much and giving little.
MAN. I am asking little and giving much.
LADY. A new lover indeed! What will you ask?
MAN. Yourself.
LADY. Is that so small a favour?
MAN. In the world where you speak of favours it may be the greatest. t that world is not mine.
LADY. What more can a woman give than herself?
MAN. Those are words again. You repeat a lesson men have taught u.
LADY. And what do you offer? A wedding-ring, perhaps. Are to marry and breed philosophers?
MAN. There are worse brats.
LADY. True, they might be gentlemen-in-waiting. Or——
MAN. Or their servants, you would say.
LADY. You are too conscious of your trade.
MAN. Because your head swims at the thought of the gulf be-een us.
LADY. That is no more than habit. All service is honourable.
MAN. No. It is infamous to serve luxury. It is shameful to pour

wine into gouty veins, it is base to creep between borrowed sheets quality. Lackeys do these things.

LADY. Not only lackeys, my friend. I have done them too.

MAN. We have both been waiting for this day.

LADY [*with a smile*]. Come, you will not tell me that your love is long standing?

MAN. I have loved you since the first hour.

LADY. At Covent Garden? Is it possible? And through this wear round of Bath and London you were there?

MAN. I stood in waiting. A door was opened, and you passed. coach drew up at a gateway, and you alighted. A lamp was lit in you window, a blind was drawn. I stood below.

LADY. Unseen.

MAN. The crowd has many faces.

LADY. Yours was one of them. This courtship touches me. B I think there was hatred in your love. Confess it—love for the woma hatred for the plaything and the mistress.

MAN. The same wheels splashed us both. I knew that we were o

LADY. I have turned my back on that life, and yet . . . No, n my friend. Every meeting brings a parting. You shall keep yo philosophy and leave me my illusions.

MAN. I offer more than love.

LADY. Then it is more than I deserve. Listen, my friend. Yo were right to hold my favours lightly. When a woman has given her self often enough, once more or less makes no matter. The house i quiet, we are alone together. You please me and I trust you. Bu because you offer more than I can give, I will say no. Because yo are upright and I am stooping it cannot be. Because we are friend let us not risk falling out. I cannot give a trifle to such as you.

MAN. I do not ask for trifles. Love is everywhere. The shallow are alive with spawning lovers. This earth is peopled by them. Lov is everywhere, and yet the world is sick. Love is everywhere, and ye the maggots thrive. We spring from love, we rot and wither in th name of love, while the earth renews itself in stillness. I do not as for dregs of love. I do not ask for last year's leaves, or pebbles carrie by the stream.

LADY. To promise you more would wrong us both. Oh, my friend you know all that stands between us! You are ennobled by th truth of what you feel, and yet you see me falsely. But my eyes ar open still, and I can see the world you ask me to forget. It is an ugl world, my friend, but it is mine and yours. We cannot leave it out o reckoning.

MAN. Your pride speaks there.

LADY. Believe me, it is the rag of pride that covers humility. D

ot strip me of that; I will show you it is no more than a rag. All have given to others is yours for the asking. Leave it untouched, y friend. Pass by and forget me.

MAN. I would strip the rags of pride from both of us. We have o more to do with them. We have met and spoken; we are two who annot forget. I will not kneel to you, woman whom I serve. I will ot beg from you, woman whom I love. You will give what is in our heart.

LADY. And if it be empty?

MAN. It is not.

LADY. Can we be sure?

MAN. You and I know the ring of emptiness. We have lived long nough without each other. Yesterday was empty, to-morrow may e empty, to-day is full. The earth is round about us. The young orn sleeps standing in the mist, and the fern-owl lies awake. The ew falls on trembling leaves, and the sheep are thick in the fold. This in where we have met is wrapped in stillness—this house of ticking houghts, this house of whispering passions, this house of dreams that tir the face of night. Words die in empty corridors; our natures live. You are mine already, as I am yours. We are held in one embrace.

LADY. If that were true!

MAN. Our hands are clasped unseen, our lips are parted. One image f serenity is in our minds. Ours, this solitude that blots the recollection of ourselves. Ours, this meeting that divides us from the past. Not mine alone, but ours! Already you have given all.

LADY [*in a low voice*]. I think I have given much.

MAN. I have never touched you, and yet you have given all. There s no parting between us.

LADY. There is no parting. [*Holding out her arms to him*] Oh, my riend—my lover!

MAN [*taking her hands*]. We are set free.

LADY. Is this for ever? I have never asked a man before—is this or ever? Why should I ask you?

MAN. It is for ever and a day.

LADY [*suddenly*]. I thought I heard footsteps.

MAN [*listening*]. A horse moved in the stable.

LADY. Footsteps.

MAN. The outer life begins to stir again. To-morrow puts a foot pon the floor.

LADY [*breaking from his embrace*]. What have I done? Who are ou—my lover? Who are you, sir? [*Imperiously*] Answer me!

MAN. Shall I tell my lady that I am a gentleman in disguise, in eague with my lord? [*Bitterly*] And if I tell you so, will you believe ne?

LADY. This world of stratagem! My heart is worn away. Tak what is left of it, and give me yours. I will believe your heart, m lover.

## ACT III

*The scene as before. Morning sunlight. Enter the* INNKEEPER.

INNKEEPER. Eight o'clock of a bright morning, and nobody astir Well, it's not every day that we have the quality in the house. Le them sleep their fill: I wager they have earned it. We were all youn once. [*At the window*] So they drew the shutters overnight, did they That was to let in the moonlight, I'll be bound. The moon for lovers Here's a candle burned to the socket, and another with a nightcap o Ha, ha! You could tell a tale if you would, my beauties. And her my lady's kerchief; she will need that before the day is out. [*Leanin over the back of a chair*] Here it was she sat, with my lord bendin over her and whispering in her ear. And as she turned to hide he blushes the kerchief slipped from her hand. Yes, that's plain. Ther one candle guttered, and the other was put out. The cap lay handy on the table. There was moon enough to light them up the stairs This way, my lady. This way, my pretty one. And then she stops maybe. Not so fast, my lord, not so fast. And he falls on one knee and kisses her hand—a proper nobleman. [*With a twinge*] My joints are creaking; that means a change in the weather. I knew the morning was too bright to last. [*Resuming his pantomime*] Then she draws her hand away, but gently, leaving a promise on his lips. She runs a step or two; this way, maybe; no, that way. And he follows after—out of the moonbeams into the dark. She gives him the slip and gains the stair. And then she turns to look at him. Not so fast, my lord—but with a smile. In one spring he is at her feet. [*With another twinge*] Plague on my creaky knees; this is no poor man's sport. [*Resuming*] She leaves her hand in his; the stair is wide enough for two. They mount together. And so——

[*His* WIFE *has entered, and stands arms akimbo watching him.*]

WIFE [*indignant*]. And so! And so! What clowning is this?

INNKEEPER [*ruefully*]. I said it was no poor man's sport. [*Rubbing his knees*] 'Tis entertainment for the quality.

WIFE. I'll give you quality! Are they still a-bed?

INNKEEPER. They are indeed, and small blame to them.

WIFE. My lord and my lady can please themselves, but their servants should have been stirring an hour ago.

INNKEEPER [*broadly*]. And so they were, I warrant.

WIFE. I'll have no lie-a-bed followers in this house. Let me pass; ll rouse them sharp enough.

INNKEEPER. Not so fast, wife. They have the day before them— d we have a week of their company if we make them at home.

WIFE. A week of fiddlesticks! What of the pair of saddle-horses at Moony brought this morning?

INNKEEPER. Saddle-horses! Where did he get them?

WIFE. How should I know? At the Wheatsheaf, very likely. I und him tying them up behind the barn, and all he would say was e had his orders

INNKEEPER. Orders, indeed! He was sent on another errand.

WIFE. Yes, and paid a pretty sum to keep his mouth shut, if I know loony.

INNKEEPER. His lordship's servant spoke to me last night of horses. told him there was not a pair to be had this side of Oxford.

WIFE. And there they stand behind the barn, waiting for their riders.

INNKEEPER. That servant is too close for my liking

WIFE. Oh, he's well enough. But watch his master, I say, and see our reckoning is paid before they cross the threshold.

INNKEEPER. What, woman, would you presume to cast a slur upon s lordship?

WIFE. Trust him as far as you can see him, I say. And have your ckoning made ready

INNKEEPER. They will be here this day week, I tell you

WIFE. Maybe. And maybe not.

INNKEEPER [*uneasily*]. This is some lovers' quarrel. My lord was oo brisk, perhaps. They may make it up.

WIFE. You with your lovers' quarrels! These travellers have more han love between them. [*Enter the* MAN, *coming downstairs.*

INNKEEPER. Good morning to you. We were awaiting his lordship's rders.

MAN. Presently. I have to speak with the man who was sent on n errand last evening.

INNKEEPER. You will find him in the yard.

MAN. I thank you. [*He crosses over and goes out.*

WIFE. I like that man better than his master.

INNKEEPER. My father said to me "My son," he said, "an inn- eeper's trade is the merriest of trades, for he lights overnight the mp of to-morrow. It is the fairest of trades, for the pleasures of eep are never entered in the bill. It is the plainest of trades, for very customer must be taken at his word." Now I take my lord to e a nobleman, for he calls himself so; and my lady to be a woman of nk, for she has a queenly way with her; and their followers are no

concern of ours. So let us keep all as long as we may, and send thes satisfied on their road. [*Enter the* NOBLEMAN, *coming downstair*

INNKEEPER [*bowing*]. Good morning to your lordship. I trust yo lordship slept well?

NOBLEMAN [*with a yawn*]. As well as could be expected.

INNKEEPER. Ha, ha! I understand your lordship. The comforts poor house can offer——

NOBLEMAN. An excellent house, innkeeper. A most hospitable hous Send my servant to me.

INNKEEPER [*about to go*]. I hope your lordship does not think o leaving us yet awhile?

NOBLEMAN. On no account. That reminds me—how are th horses?

INNKEEPER [*with hesitation*]. Which horses, my lord?

NOBLEMAN. Why, mine and my lady's.

INNKEEPER. All dead lame, my lord. Three days will not see the on the road.

NOBLEMAN. Then we shall be in no hurry. Now send my servan

INNKEEPER. I will, my lord. [*To his* WIFE] What did I say?

[*Exeunt* INNKEEPER *and* WIFE. *The* NOBLEMAN *alone, the enter the* MAID, *coming downstairs. She curtseys to him and is about to cross over to the door.*

NOBLEMAN. No good morning for me, pretty one?

MAID [*with another curtsey*]. Good morning, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Is your mistress astir?

MAID. My lady will be with your lordship presently.

NOBLEMAN. I hope she passed a good night?

MAID. Your lordship should ask her that yourself.

NOBLEMAN. Did you hear nothing as you plaited her hair?

MAID. Nothing, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Discreet baggage! It is true that nights are made to be forgotten. [*Coming close to her*] You can forget, I think?

MAID. Perhaps, my lord.

NOBLEMAN [*slipping a coin into her hand*]. We will rock your memory to sleep.

MAID [*glancing at the money*]. Is that all your lordship has to say to me?

NOBLEMAN. This is the morning. What would you have me say? Still, we must not be ungrateful. Thank you, my dear.

MAID. Thank you, my lord. [*She goes out. The* MAN *returns.*

NOBLEMAN. Well, Charles. What news of the conquest?

MAN. I obeyed my lord's command.

NOBLEMAN. You played the lover?

MAN. I did, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Successfully, no doubt?
MAN. That is for my lord to judge.
NOBLEMAN. At least you played with eloquence. Come, Charles, I ll swear that you were eloquent—a furnace of sighs quenched in a rrent of declaration.
MAN. I spoke as the occasion moved me.
NOBLEMAN. We can none of us do more. Sincerity is the lover's e. But you were bold, were you not?
MAN. Perhaps too bold.
NOBLEMAN. A good fault. You stood your ground as an equal? ou cut the figure of the faithful friend?
MAN. Yes, my lord.
NOBLEMAN. No flattery, I hope—no fawning on her self-esteem. ou were the modest adorer, but not too modest—the humble servant ithout the cap in hand.
MAN. Your lordship guesses rightly.
NOBLEMAN. Because I know you, Charles, and I know this woman. ie is only to be won by the pretence of candour. There is one key at unlocks every heart, and you were the man to find it.
MAN. I fear your lordship rates me too highly.
NOBLEMAN. You are a pearl among men.
MAN. Still, your lordship may not be satisfied with the result.
NOBLEMAN. What! You will not tell me that you failed with her?
MAN. My lady—but I dare not confess it to your lordship——
NOBLEMAN. Speak, man!
MAN. My lady perceived the truth behind my make-believe.
NOBLEMAN. The truth! Is it possible?
MAN. Certain, my lord.
NOBLEMAN. Curse her cunning! These clever women are the ague. So my plan has miscarried?
MAN. It has, my lord.
NOBLEMAN. Strange. I would have staked a fortune on your suc- ss. I would have taken oath that she was at heart a sentimentalist one of the creatures moved by words. [*Yawning*] And so you passed lonely night? My luckless Charles! I will confess that I was more rtunate.
MAN. I congratulate your lordship.
NOBLEMAN. You need not envy me, Charles. The tender passion much overrated by the poets. They have their living to earn, poor llows. The only lasting pleasures are those of the mind. Now I am eaking an excellent rule, which is not to be philosophical after supper before breakfast. But you need have no regrets. You failed nobly, u failed gloriously, and perhaps it was better so. One of us at least holds the banner of chastity.

MAN. Your lordship thinks that my success would have been short-lived?

NOBLEMAN. The morning brings reflection. Even had you succeeded, we should still have had her pride to reckon with. Sooner or later she would have found you out. And then a woman tricked, a woman humbled—such cattle are dangerous.

MAN. You may be right, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. These midnight romances are always repented. They can even be denied when the proof is lacking. I have denied them myself on occasion.

MAN. A man of honour must often do as much.

NOBLEMAN. Precisely, Charles. And where a man lies from chivalry a woman will lie in self-defence. Come, do not take your failure to heart. My scheme was too ambitious. It was too much to hope that my lady would stoop in one flight from the bedchamber to the kitchen.

MAN. Your lordship is outspoken.

NOBLEMAN. Believe me, Charles, I know how to value your qualities. You are more than the most excellent of servants. But as a lover—ha, ha, ha! I must have drunk a glass of wine too much last evening. I trusted an impulse when I incited you to play the gallant. Be content with your philosophy, and order me my coffee.

MAN. I will, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Until it is ready, I will walk in the garden and pay your respects to the goddess of nature. She will not scorn you—ha, ha, ha!

[*Exit the* NOBLEMAN, *in good humour. The* MAN *remains.*

MAN. My lord shoots at random, and poisoned barbs fly home. If words are death, can words be life? May be that she was moved by words—enraptured by love's litany, as women are, they say. May be that I saw manhood mirrored in some cloudy pool of self-deception. May be that we are sentimentalists—that bitter word! May be that love itself was deepened by the stream of utterance. No, that is false: the depth was in ourselves from the beginning. That river sprang from living rock. Still, no more words. I will not plead a second time. The wooing hour is past. I will not flatter, or persuade, or supplicate. I will not ape the chivalrous gentleman whose memory is short for ladies' favours. I will remember. But if words are death, let life be silence.

[*Exit the* MAN. *The* LADY *descends the stairs, and a little after her the* MAID *enters from the other side.*

MAID [*in astonishment*]. Oh, my lady——!

LADY [*turning to her*]. Well?

MAID. I ask pardon, my lady, but your dress——

LADY. The riding-habit surprises you? [*With a smile*] I found it in

e trunk you had so thoughtfully packed. It will be needed for the st of my journey.

MAID. But your ladyship knows I cannot ride.

LADY. I know that, Louise. You and I are about to part.

MAID. To part! Oh, my lady, my lady, do not leave me here.

LADY. You will be safe enough. Indeed I think you may be handmely rewarded, for you will have a tale to tell or leave untold. Our asters are liberal on such occasions.

MAID. Let me follow you! do not leave me with——

LADY. With whom, my child? Has any man done you an injury?

MAID. My lady, I meant no harm! Overlook it for this once!

LADY. Last night your room was empty.

MAID. My lord was pressing—— I was weak—— I meant no arm——

LADY. My lord? I understand you now. This inn brings happiess and misery together—deepest delight and emptiest desolation.

MAID. Oh, my lady, forgive me! I promise you it is for the last me!

LADY. Can any of us promise so much?

MAID. I swear it!

LADY. Poor child! Commit no perjuries on my account. My forne, not your folly, is the reason of our parting. We have no more say to one another. Bring me my cloak when I call. And now ave me to your noble lover, for I have to speak with him alone.

[*Exit the* MAID. *The* LADY *seats herself at the spinet and plays.*

*Song*

LADY. "Go, all pursue the dreams of night,
Grey shadows of the moon;
My love and I make our delight
The golden hour of noon.

Let nightingales enchant the breeze
Within a leafy lair;
Our song the murmur of the bees,
The quiver of the air.

In silences of starry hours
Let sleepers take their pleasure:
But sweeter is the breath of flowers
Where hearts will dance a measure."

[*The* NOBLEMAN *returns from the garden.*

NOBLEMAN [*gallantly*]. You have brought the sunshine with you, adam.

LADY. It is a lovely morning, my lord, but I would gladly exchange it for the night.

NOBLEMAN. We can put the clock forward to please you.

LADY. But I would put it back.

NOBLEMAN. Indeed?

LADY. I dread these mornings, when men who have been gallant are so no longer, and women who have been rash must nurse their pride alone. Perhaps I have seen too many of them. Our moods are dangerous, my lord. Our hearts are our greatest enemies. At night we yield to falsehood, but in this pitiless sunlight we see the truth too plainly.

NOBLEMAN. I confess that I am still groping in the dark.

LADY. Oh, my lord, you are fortunate! But I think your eyes are as good as mine.

NOBLEMAN [*gallantly*]. Indeed I wish they were.

LADY. No compliments, I beg of you. [*With a sigh*] I am too conscious of their insincerity. Your tone to me is cold this morning.

NOBLEMAN. I fear it was none too warm last night.

LADY. There you do yourself an injustice. Oh, we had words, I know; there was a misunderstanding between us. At first I was mistaken in you. You were harsh, my lord, and I was unfeeling. But you will not deny the generosity with which you made amends.

NOBLEMAN [*uneasily*]. I do not remember——

LADY. Must I remind you? That is not the woman's part. Spare my pride.

NOBLEMAN. Am I dreaming, or was I——?

LADY. Must I remind you of your courtesy, your delicacy, your ardour—of all the true nobility, so far removed from the false nobility of rank, that streamed from your nature?

NOBLEMAN. I am at a loss to understand——

LADY. Oh, my lord, you may forget, but I shall not! As I listened to those passionate words, I knew that here at last was your better self.

NOBLEMAN. My better—— [*With an outburst*] This is a trap, madam!

LADY. Do not be cruel. Do not deny your own chivalry. I cannot bear that. I am only a woman, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. You are a vixen!

LADY. Those words from you! Oh, what is this fatal circle into which I have stepped? Once a mistress, always a mistress. A plaything tossed from man to man. One day the Prince's, and the next—yours.

NOBLEMAN. I deny it! Shameless creature! Will you have the insolence to claim me as your lover?

LADY [*turning from him*]. Oh, poor, poor women! And cruel, cruel men!

NOBLEMAN. You lie, and you know it. I hated you from the first. ot a word of love has passed between us.

LADY [*with mock despair*]. Have I been deceived in you, my lord! e you like all the rest, who win a woman's heart only to betray her eakness? Will you not even boast of the conquest you have made?

NOBLEMAN. Enough of this mummery! I have never so much as proached you.

LADY. All men are alike. Our reputation is nothing to them.

NOBLEMAN. Yours, madam, can look after itself.

LADY. Be careful, my lord, how you drive a desperate woman. If e should be overtaken here, whose reputation will suffer—yours or ine?

NOBLEMAN. You would never dare to charge me with——

LADY. With abusing your position as the gallant rescuer? And why ot?

NOBLEMAN. I can prove it false.

LADY. How, my lord? We passed the night under this roof. Will nyone believe you passed it alone?

NOBLEMAN. I will prove——

LADY. An alibi, my lord? It may be difficult.

NOBLEMAN. I will swear my innocence.

LADY. That would indeed be chivalrous. But what if I confessed? Who would imagine you in the part of Joseph?

NOBLEMAN. The Prince would never believe you.

LADY. Is a confession ever disbelieved by a lover?

NOBLEMAN. All who know me will accept my word.

LADY. Your word of honour, my lord, against a woman's avowal of er guilt? We shall see.

NOBLEMAN [*blustering*]. Such a tale is on the face of it ridiculous.

LADY. But not so ridiculous as your denials. Come, my lord, you nderrate your success as a cavalier. You cut a very presentable figure, assure you. You have broken scores of hearts in your time.

NOBLEMAN. Oh, this is monstrous!

LADY. A handsome face, an elegant figure. I might very well be mpted in earnest.

NOBLEMAN [*retreating*]. I beg you to consider——

LADY. Calm yourself, my lord. We will not proceed to extremes; ur virtue is safe in my keeping. But remember, one word in the ince's ear, and I am rid of you both. I leave you to order pistols r daybreak, as great gentlemen do on such occasions.

NOBLEMAN. And if he should fall?

LADY. Have no fear, my lord; I will not claim you. You shall kick ur heels in the Tower alone.

NOBLEMAN. So this is a woman's honour!

LADY. We fight with the weapons that come to hand. [*A silence*

NOBLEMAN. Very well, madam. If I own myself beaten—what ar your terms?

LADY. Terms, my lord?

NOBLEMAN. Come, we understand each other. We can conclude bargain.

LADY. I do not traffic with my lovers.

NOBLEMAN. I am not your lover!

LADY. So you declare, my lord. But can you prove it?

NOBLEMAN. I will make an offer. You shall be safely escorted t London.

LADY. Indeed? And safely hidden there, no doubt?

NOBLEMAN. Willingly.

LADY. And housed and fed? And carried to Dover, and put aboar the packet?

NOBLEMAN. As you please.

LADY. And all from dread of a word I may whisper in the Princ ear?

NOBLEMAN. A word, remember, that would harm you as well as me

LADY. These are miracles of kindness indeed. And who, pray, wi be my escort?

NOBLEMAN. My servant can be trusted.

LADY. Your servant? Are you sure of that?

NOBLEMAN. He is a plain fellow, but honest. I would rely on hi as on——

LADY. As on yourself, my lord? Shall I not ask for more security

NOBLEMAN. Let us be reasonable. I have had occasion to confide i him before now.

LADY. You have entrusted him with delicate missions, no doubt?

NOBLEMAN. Often.

LADY. And he has never failed you?

NOBLEMAN. I assure you, madam, that he is the man for your purpose.

LADY. Then I suppose I must believe you. But this man of your has a romantic character, I think. He has honoured me by particula attentions.

NOBLEMAN. You astonish me.

LADY. And even by a sort of declaration.

NOBLEMAN. Is it possible? As you say, there may be a strain of romance in his nature. No doubt you put him in his place?

LADY. Yes, my lord. I was able to judge his sentiments at their true value.

NOBLEMAN. Ha, ha! My luckless Charles! Forgive my laughter, madam, but the fellow's presumption tickles me. My Charles a wooer! Ha, ha! I only wish I could have heard his protestations.

LADY. Your lordship would have found them vastly amusing.

NOBLEMAN. I should have split my sides

LADY. Of course you regret this affront that has been offered to ne?

NOBLEMAN. Naturally, madam, I regret it. But remember, a spice f devotion in a servant does no harm. He will be all the safer as an scort.

LADY. You think so?

NOBLEMAN. I am sure of it.

LADY. It seems that your lordship is bent upon throwing us together t all costs.

NOBLEMAN. Come, I vow on my honour that you can trust him.

LADY. Your honour should be good enough for me. But can I rust myself, my lord?

NOBLEMAN [*suspicious*]. Madam?

LADY. When my heart is once given there is no turning back.

[*Enter the* MAN, *hastily.*

NOBLEMAN. Well, Charles?

MAN [*breathless*]. My lord, may I speak with you alone?

NOBLEMAN. Speak, man. My lady and I are agreed.

MAN. My lord, the Prince's coach——

NOBLEMAN [*turning pale*]. Not—not at the door?

MAN. Not yet, my lord. But it comes this way.

NOBLEMAN. Impossible! He should be in Oxford.

MAN. The coach turned back to the crossroads. By now it has eached the foot of the long hill. It will be here in an hour.

NOBLEMAN. An hour, and all our horses lame! We are lost!

LADY. My lord, I demand your protection.

NOBLEMAN. We are lost!

LADY. I demand the protection you have promised me.

NOBLEMAN. I am powerless to help you.

LADY. Then I must speak.

NOBLEMAN. No, no! Listen to me. Are you prepared to fly on oot?

LADY. If need be, yes.

NOBLEMAN. The need is desperate. The Prince must not find you ere. [*To the* MAN] Charles, you will prepare to convey this lady afely to London. I will give you a letter to my cousin, who will keep er hidden in her house. Travel by what means you can discover; I will join you in three days. You understand me?

MAN. I understand, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. Pen and paper. I will write instantly.

[*Exit the* NOBLEMAN, *hastily. The* LADY *and the* MAN *remain.*

LADY. Is this a dream? I played a comedy while I slept. My lord

stood there, I here. We matched our wits against each other. Far away, as if in a playhouse, I heard the words we spoke. I lied to him; he lied to me. I pressed him and he weakened. I breathed a tainted, stifling air. My hands were soiled. [*She looks at them.*] And then you came. A sudden brightness. I heard the song of birds again. I felt the buds that opened to the sun. Oh, my friend and my lover, take my hand in yours and let us go together!

MAN [*motionless*]. The Prince's coach comes up the hill.

LADY. Was that tale true? I thought it was a line of the comedy —an echo of our make-believe.

MAN. His coach comes nearer, step by step.

LADY. I can hear no sound of grinding wheels; that world is silent: I can see no gouty figure propped among the cushions. My lids are closed; I see you only.

MAN. He is there. Your world is there. Wake! Wake! I take no dreamer with me. I take no mistress from cloudland. This is morning. Wake, woman, wake!

LADY. Do you call me woman?

MAN. I make so bold, madam.

LADY. Madam? What tone is this?

MAN. The tone of a man who knows that you are woman. The tone of a lover who will have all or nothing.

LADY. Have I not given all?

MAN. No, madam. You have given such favours as a woman grants to a man who pleases her—such tributes as are paid by sentiment to passion.

LADY. Sentiment! Passion! Will you deny the reality of my—of what I thought was love for you?

MAN. I deny nothing, but I claim more than favours. Are you ready to venture your life—yourself?

LADY. Yes, I believe that I am.

MAN. But I am not!

LADY. You——?

MAN. I am not! Oh, it should be easy! The plot is laid for us; the web is spun that sets us free. The doors are opened. Smooth words are all that we need say to one another—words as smooth as kisses. I cannot speak them. I cannot play your comedy of love. I cannot trust your faith in me. You think that in this tangle of falsehood I am true. You take my hand—blindly. But I too am false. When I made love to you it was at my lord's command.

LADY. You!

MAN. It was a trick to humble you. It was a revenge of my lord's planning. You were to stoop to a servant, and put yourself in his power.

LADY. Oh, monstrous! I have put myself in yours!

MAN. I played you false when I consented to the stratagem. I will make no excuse. I will not say it was because I loved you——

LADY [*proudly*]. No, sir, do not say that! Leave me some pride, I beg of you! Oh, infamous! Falsehood on falsehood—maze within maze of lying!

MAN. So now you are awakened. The dream is over. You need have no fear of me. I have as much honour as a gentleman—neither more nor less. Your secret is safe. There is no one who need ever guess it.

LADY. You have not betrayed me to——

MAN. To my master? No, madam.

LADY. But why not? Is it possible that you are——?

MAN. My lord is not in my confidence.

LADY. Oh, why did you speak? There would have been time enough to tell me. I was ready to go with you! I was ready to trust you!

MAN. You were ready to deceive yourself—to follow where fortune beckoned—to listen to midnight whispers of romance. You were prepared to take a risk, madam. I was for certainty. You were for hope, I was for knowledge. You have given me a trifle, I have given you something more. Return to Bath in the royal coach that pursues you. In a little while, perhaps, you will smile at the adventure. I will follow my lord to London, and leave him there. We shall not meet again.

LADY. You are bitter. You are unjust.

MAN. I see the line of ladies from whom you are descended. You see the line of servingmen that stretches out behind me. But which of us can see the day when they will meet and take each other's hands? Go back to your own world.

LADY. You know that I shall not go back. This coach that climbs the hill is nothing to me. Within it sits a life that is already dead. My life began again in you. My friend, for a moment I doubted you; I beg your forgiveness. Your voice was cold; I thought you unfaithful. Now I see that you spoke from an open heart. I throw myself on your mercy. Take me as I am and make me yours.

MAN. It may be too late.

[*Re-enter the* NOBLEMAN, *with a letter in his hand.*

NOBLEMAN. Here is the letter, Charles. Now lose no time. Are you both ready?

LADY. Presently, my lord. A cloak is all I need.

NOBLEMAN [*impatient*]. For God's sake hasten, madam. This is no time for ceremony. I will speak with the innkeeper. It may be he knows of a hiding-place. [*Exit the* NOBLEMAN.

LADY [*turning to the* MAN *with a smile*]. You see they are resolved that we shall fly together. Will you come, my friend, or shall I forget my sex and kneel to you?

MAN. At this moment my lord finds the pair of horses I have placed behind the inn. He takes them for his own discovery. He will urge us to mount and ride away.

LADY. I am ready.

MAN. What is this flight but one more stratagem, one more betrayal of ourselves?

LADY. What would you do?

MAN. Remain here and declare the truth that we are lovers. Then you shall come with me if you will.

LADY. No, not that, I beg of you!

MAN. Are we criminals? Must we be hypocrites?

LADY. My friend, let the past sleep. You and I together are awakened. I will not see you slighted by these men whom we despise. Leave them to their dreams; leave them their world to play with. What are they to us?

MAN. And if I tell you I am resolved to meet them now?

LADY. My lover, I have asked nothing for my own sake. I will ask one thing only. Spare my weakness; do not try to make a heroine of a woman. I have lived in a servitude baser than yours. These gentlemen are my masters too. I have given them my youth, I have lent myself to their intrigues, I have sold my honour for their rank and fashion. They have left me nothing but my heart, which you possess. I humble myself before you. Do not ask me to stoop to them again.

MAN. The coach comes nearer. Our horses are saddled. We can only ride together as free lovers who have left falsehood behind. Are you ready to meet your Prince's sneers and my lord's triumphant mockery? Will you take the step that is decisive? I am no longer a servant; you have released me. I do not obey, and I will not command. I ask all, but I plead for nothing. Choose for yourself.

LADY [*after a silence*]. It shall be—as you resolve.

MAN. Then you are willing to remain?

LADY. I trust myself, since I trust you.

MAN. You will do this—for our love?

LADY. I obey—my lord and master.

MAN. Take back your freedom. The will is enough.

[*The* MAID *comes down the stairs, carrying a cloak.*

MAID. My lady's cloak.

MAN [*taking it, and putting it over the* LADY'S *shoulders*]. Come! We are ready.

LADY. Are we to go now?

MAN. Now.

LADY [*turning to him with a smile*]. But tell me—did you mean to remain? Are you indeed a hero?

MAN. What are they to us?

LADY. So that was the last stratagem! Laughter comes back again. My friend, give me your hand before the world—our world! We have no more to fear. [*The* MAN *takes her hand.*

MAID [*falling on her knees*]. Oh, my lady, my lady!

LADY [*turning to her*]. So you are left behind. This is good-bye. Take my trinkets, and remember me kindly.

MAID. My lady, I have understood!

[*Re-enter the* NOBLEMAN, *breathless.*

NOBLEMAN. Charles, Charles! The coach is in sight, not half a mile away. By good fortune I have found a pair of horses for you; they stand saddled at the door. Mount and ride for your lives. Are you prepared?

MAN [*drawing himself up*]. Stand aside, my lord, for my lady!

[*The* NOBLEMAN *obeys mechanically. The* MAN *and the* LADY, *ignoring him, go out hand in hand. The* NOBLEMAN, *in astonishment, turns to the* MAID.

NOBLEMAN. Am I in my senses? What was that?

MAID [*sobbing*]. Oh, my lady! She has found the way!

NOBLEMAN [*shaking her*]. Speak, you hussy! What—was—that?

MAID. They have gone!

NOBLEMAN. Fool! So much I can see!

MAID. They have gone to each other.

NOBLEMAN. To each other! My Charles and that woman! Am I tricked? [*Calling*] Innkeeper! Innkeeper! Stop those runaways! Stop them, I say! [*The* INNKEEPER *appears in the doorway.*

INNKEEPER. They are gone, my lord.

NOBLEMAN. By which road?

INNKEEPER. My lord, they took to the downs at a gallop. They are over the brow of the hill by this time.

NOBLEMAN. Did they speak?

INNKEEPER. They said nothing, my lord, but I think they laughed together. [*Exit the* INNKEEPER.

NOBLEMAN. They laughed—these fools in love! We can laugh too. Ha, ha, ha! [*Checking himself suddenly*] But the Prince! I must have proof when he arrives. [*To the* MAID] Listen to me, pretty one.

MAID. I am listening.

NOBLEMAN. This tale may not be believed. The Prince may suspect that I have conveyed her away.

MAID. And so, my lord?

NOBLEMAN. You will tell his Highness what passed between us last night.

MAID. I—tell him?

NOBLEMAN. It shall be made worth your while. Here is my purse, girl. Can I depend upon you?

MAID [*striking him a blow in the face*]. No, my lord! You cannot!

NOBLEMAN. Hell-cat!

[*The* MAID *runs out. Re-enter the* INNKEEPER *with a bill in his hand.*

INNKEEPER. My lord, a coach with outriders has just turned the corner. It comes this way.

NOBLEMAN. What is that in your hand?

INNKEEPER. Your lordship's reckoning.

NOBLEMAN [*taking it, reads*]. What! Am I to foot the bill for these runaways, these vagabonds?

INNKEEPER. My lord, it is the privilege of a man of quality.

[*The* NOBLEMAN *tears the reckoning across, and stamps upon it in a fury.*

# THE WHITE CHÂTEAU

## By REGINALD BERKELEY

*First produced at the Everyman Theatre, London, March 29, 1927*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

*First Scene*

The Chronicler
Charles Van Eysen
Diane Van Eysen
An Officer of Uhlans
Two Troopers
Madame Van Eysen
Jacques Van Eysen
Violet Cording
A Sergeant
Maids
An Orderly

*Second Scene*

The Chronicler
The Chief of Staff
An Aide-de-camp
The Chancellor
The Commander-in-Chief
A Staff Colonel
An Orderly
The Deputy Chief of Staff

*Third Scene*

The Chronicler
An Officer's Servant
Lieutenant Barrington
Second Lieut. Courtney
The Colonel
The Sergeant
A Private Rifleman
Captain Braithwaite
Second Lieut. Matheson
Artillery Liaison Officer
A Linesman
A Stretcher-bearer

*Fourth Scene*

The Chronicler
Captain Luttrell
Sergeant Harvey
Philip Luttrell
The Sergeant-Major
A Guide
Private Cossington
Soldiers

*Fifth Scene*

The Chronicler
An Army Nursing Sister
Diane Van Eysen
An American Doctor
Philip Luttrell
A General Officer

*Sixth Scene*

THE CHRONICLER — DIANE
PHILIP LUTTRELL — A WORKMAN
A WORKS MANAGER

*The action takes place at the White Château, in Flanders, during and soon after the European War.*

*For staging this play the First and Second Scenes constitute Act I, the Third and Fourth Scenes Act II, and the Fifth and Sixth Scenes Act III.*

REGINALD BERKELEY, who was called to the New Zealand Bar in 1912, and to the Middle Temple in 1919, began writing in 1911, with contributions to the *Auckland Observer*. *Eight o'Clock*, produced at the Little Theatre in 1921, was written in 1913, in which year *The Oilskin Packet*, a novel in collaboration with James Dixon, published in 1917, was begun. During the War he served with the Rifle Brigade, receiving a staff appointment in 1918. *French Leave*, produced at the Globe Theatre in 1920, and subsequently transferred to the Apollo, where it ran nearly a year, was begun in the winter of 1916 during a short spell of illness at the Fourteenth Corps' rest-station. It was completed during convalescence from wounds in 1917, and was first played by officers of the Rifle Brigade at the Reserve Battalion Theatre. After the War the author joined the staff of the League of Nations Union, afterward working for the Secretariat of the League. In 1922 he entered Parliament, of which he was a member until 1924, and in the former year he completed *Mango Island*, begun in 1919 and published with *The World's End* and *Eight o'Clock* in 1926. In 1924 *Unparliamentary Papers* was published. In 1925 *The White Château* idea was first given expression in a short form, for broadcasting on Armistice Night, and in 1927 the present full-length play was written for production at the Everyman Theatre, where it was played for two weeks, subsequently being transferred to the St Martin's Theatre. Other plays by the same author are *Mr Abdulla*, produced at the Playhouse in 1926, and *The Lady with a Lamp*, produced at the Garrick Theatre in 1929. The latter is an exceptionally fine play, and promises to be one of the outstanding successes of the period. *Dawn*, a novel based on the life of Edith Cavell, was published in 1928.

Reference has already been made to the subject of war-plays in the preface to the present volume, and it is sufficient to say concerning *The White Château* that it is probably the best play of its kind that England has so far achieved.

# FIRST SCENE

*Music*

THE CHRONICLER

This story of the White Château
That, in the thriving Flanders plain,
Was builded centuries ago,
Burned down, and builded up again,
And ever, through succeeding years,
Destroyed, and builded up once more,
Shall come familiarly to ears
Attunèd to the din of War.

*The scene is the panelled dining-room of the White Château—a nobly proportioned apartment overlooking a timbered park. In the distance the spires and buildings of a quaint Flemish town. The ground falls away from the Château, which stands on a low hill dominating the flat Flanders plain.*

*Breakfast—a meal imported into the Van Eysen family by* JACQUES, *the son of the house (fresh from Oxford and full of English ideas)—has been in progress some ten minutes. The table is laid for five; so far, however, only three are in their places*—CHARLES VAN EYSEN, *the owner of the Château*; MARIE VAN EYSEN, *his wife*; *and* JACQUES, *the son.*

MADAME VAN EYSEN *is presiding over the coffee-pot with all the attention she can spare from doting on* JACQUES, *from whom she never seems to take her eyes.* JACQUES, *a clean-limbed, pleasant-faced youngster, sensible enough to have absorbed the best of Oxford without any taints of voice or manner, is studying the local equivalent of Bradshaw.* VAN EYSEN, *with a pile of letters in front of him and the newspaper folded beside his plate, is dividing his energies between a hearty meal and the rather perfunctory perusal of his correspondence.*

JACQUES. I can't make head or tail of this wretched time-table.

MADAME VAN EYSEN [*over his shoulder*]. You're looking on the wrong page, dear. I told you. The Ostend service is at the end of the book.

JACQUES [*turning the pages*]. Oh, I see. Good Lord, if they come by

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the morning boat we'll have to start from here in the middle of the night. [*To* VAN EYSEN] I suppose the normal services will be running, Father?

VAN EYSEN. Why not?

JACQUES. I don't know . . . all this international mix-up.

VAN EYSEN. You've been listening to those ridiculous Nationalist scaremongers.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Evidently.

JACQUES. But don't you think there's a row brewing in the Balkans?

VAN EYSEN. In the Balkans? More than likely. A lot of hysterical Slavs. They're always fighting in the Balkans. Scandalous affair, murdering that Austrian Archduke. They deserve to be punished. . . . But when was Ostend shifted into the Balkans, may I ask? What has trouble in the Balkans to do with the boat service between this country and England?

JACQUES. . . . Only that they say Russia and Germany and . . . and everybody might be dragged in.

VAN EYSEN. Who say?

JACQUES. Well . . . the papers do.

VAN EYSEN. Yes! The Nationalist papers! Who pays any attention to them?

JACQUES. You know best, of course.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. That goes without saying, dear.

VAN EYSEN. Use your common sense, boy.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. And don't argue, Jacques dear. Your father knows.

JACQUES. Sorry, Father.

VAN EYSEN. Not at all, my dear boy. Not at all.

[*He resumes the reading of his letter.*

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Now, Jacques. What exactly is this plan of yours?

JACQUES. Oh, well, you see, Tommy and Philip Luttrell are coming over to see their cousin who's an *attaché* at the British Embassy. So we thought it would be rather good fun to meet them on the boat, and bring them here for a few days first.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. I see. . . . Who are the Luttrells, Jacques?

JACQUES. Well . . . they're friends of Violet's really. One of them was at New College in my first year—but I didn't really know him well then. They're most awfully nice people. . . . You remember—I stayed at their place in Worcestershire last winter.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. You sent me a picture of an old castle.

JACQUES. That's where they live. . . . You don't mind, Mother . . . if Father doesn't?

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Of course we'll have them here. . . . What a

ity they couldn't come over while Violet's brother was with us! They all know each other, I suppose.

JACQUES. Good heavens, yes! Violet's father—old Mr Cording—has got the living there, you know. [MADAME VAN EYSEN *puzzled.*] He's the local clergyman—the—er—sort of parish priest, you know.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. My dear, there is no such thing as a sort of parish priest.

[*Their conversation is interrupted by* VAN EYSEN, *who glances up suddenly from his correspondence, and, realizing that his plate is empty, looks about him for more provender.*

VAN EYSEN. I still don't in the least understand why the meals that satisfied our ancestors for generations shouldn't be good enough for us. However, if we *must* eat breakfast . . . yes, I'll have some of those eggs. [*His plate is filled.*

MADAME VAN EYSEN. The Dutch eat enormous breakfasts.

VAN EYSEN. But we do not happen to be Dutch! All my life I've been accustomed to a cup of coffee and a *brioche*. Now, in my old age, because I've squandered a fortune in sending my son to an English university instead of Louvain, which was good enough for me—now I'm told I've got to learn to eat breakfast.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. The English believe that the foundation of their empire is the English breakfast.

VAN EYSEN. Very possibly it is . . . give an Englishman enough food and a cold bath, and he'll annex the infernal regions and add them to the British Empire. . . That does not make it civilized to eat all this food at this time of day.

JACQUES. Do you suggest the English are not civilized?

VAN EYSEN. Well—we can say if you prefer that they have certain savage island customs.

JACQUES. For instance?

VAN EYSEN. For instance? Listen to the boy! For instance, my friend, they drive on the wrong side of the road. Is that civilized? . . . Then—furthermore—they ruin their wine by doctoring it with brandy—otherwise they'd think they were drinking water. And they hang their game until it goes bad because they can't taste it until it is what they call 'high.' No palate, you know. No palate! . . . [*Having finished his eggs during this tirade*] Is that cold bacon over there?

[*He goes to the side-table and carves himself a generous plateful.*

JACQUES [*watching him*]. Your contempt for their savage island customs doesn't seem to prevent you from serving God and Gammon at the same time!

MADAME VAN EYSEN [*horrified*]. How dare you, Jacques? That's most profane!

JACQUES [*penitent*]. Sorry, Mother. But he did ask for it, you know!

VAN EYSEN [*returning to his place*]. If that's a specimen of English manners, Jacques!—well, I won't say any more. You bring me an English daughter-in-law, English jokes, English breakfast——

JACQUES. Well—you don't leave much of the breakfast for anyone else!

VAN EYSEN. . . . I've no prejudice against the English, my dear boy. I like them. They're a great people. A very great people—with incomprehensible habits.

JACQUES. They're good friends to have in a row.

VAN EYSEN. Splendid!—when they've made up their minds which side to fight on! But the trouble is you never can tell in advance whether they're going to be your friends or the other fellow's friends; and that's apt to be confusing! [*Holding up a letter in his hand*] Marie, this scoundrel of a plumber has sent in his bill again for replacing the bathroom tap that his own man broke off by standing on it when they were repairing the cistern. I've spoken to you about it a dozen times before, Marie. . . .

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Have you spoken to him about it?

VAN EYSEN. Have I nothing better to do with my time than haggle with a tradesman over fifteen francs? Very well, I'll see to it myself. . . . Jacques, you will take this bill to-day, and see the man and tell him he is a rogue, and if he sends it in again I'll take drastic measures against him.

JACQUES. Yes, Father. What measures?

VAN EYSEN. Good heavens, boy, if you don't know the law, have you no imagination?

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Give it to me, Jacques. I know what to do.

VAN EYSEN. There—you leave everything to your mother. [*He tears open another letter with a grunt of displeasure, adding*] Give me some more coffee, please, Marie.

[*While this is being prepared a jolly English girl of about twenty comes in. This is* VIOLET CORDING, JACQUES' *fiancée.*

JACQUES [*rising to meet her*]. Hullo, Violet!

VIOLET [*giving him her hands*]. Hullo. . . . Good morning, Madame Van Eysen. [*Looking rather timidly towards* VAN EYSEN] Good morning.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Good morning. Charles, Violet is saying good morning to you. [*She rings the bell.*

VAN EYSEN. Eh? I beg pardon. Good morning, my dear.

[*The* MAID *enters.*

THE MAID. Madame rang?

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Another pot of coffee, and some more hot milk. [*The* MAID *goes.*] Jacques, look after Violet.

JACQUES. Rather. [*He waits on her.*

VIOLET. I don't want much. Just some coffee and toast.

JACQUES [*innocently*]. Don't you want an English breakfast?

VIOLET. Oh, no. I love the Continental way. Coffee and rolls.

JACQUES. So does Father! But he eats the other!

VIOLET [*as she takes food*]. Where's Diane?

JACQUES. Still snoring, I suppose. . . . What's every one going to do to-day?

MADAME VAN EYSEN. I'm going to the town—if your father can spare the car. . . . Can you, Charles?

VAN EYSEN [*looking up*]. Eh? Of course. Certainly.

[*Returns to his letters.*

MADAME VAN EYSEN [*to* JACQUES *and* VIOLET]. Are you two coming with me?

JACQUES. Violet, shall we go in with Mother? It's rather a lovely old town. Something like Bruges, only older. The cathedral's simply exquisite.

VIOLET. I'd love to—yes.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. You ought to see the cathedral, Violet. It's where you'll be married to Jacques—if we can persuade your father and mother to come over from England.

VIOLET. I'm sure they'd love to.

[*A younger girl, very striking in appearance, enters. This is* DIANE VAN EYSEN, *the daughter of the house—aged nineteen.*

DIANE. Hullo, everybody. . . . [*Goes to her mother and kisses her cheek.*] Anything left to eat?

[*The* MAID *returns with fresh coffee and milk.*

MADAME VAN EYSEN. There's a hot dish on the side-table . . . or eggs . . . or cold game.

DIANE. There was a hot dish! Somebody's on a diet!

[*She fends for herself.*

[VAN EYSEN *receives back his replenished coffee-cup.*

VAN EYSEN. Thanks. [*He tears open another letter.*

DIANE [*settling down with her toast and coffee*]. Can I have the paper, Daddy?

VAN EYSEN [*frowning at his letter and only half conscious of the interruption*]. Presently. Presently.

JACQUES. Don't disturb him. He's struggling with his letters.

DIANE. Reads very slowly, poor man. He's not absolutely certain of the alphabet.

VAN EYSEN. . . . What's this?

DIANE. That's what you told me—when I was a small infant and followed you about with a story-book. . . .

VAN EYSEN. . . . Oh, well—in self-defence! [*He resumes his letter.*

JACQUES. Meanwhile the master of the house, being the only one of

us to whom anybody's had the decency to write, guards the newspaper by his plate like Caxton's Chained Bible. . . . [*He pauses. His father pays no attention. He repeats.*] . . . Guards the newspaper by his plate like Caxton's Chained Bible! . .

VAN EYSEN [*looking up in despair*]. What's that? Who said I wanted the paper? Take it for goodness' sake if it'll keep you quiet while I finish my letters. All I stipulate is that it shall be returned to me uncrumpled and with the pages as nearly as possible in their original order.

JACQUES. Snubbed!

DIANE. Well, if you don't want it, I do. [*She takes it.*

JACQUES. Do you know the story of the monkey who stole the chestnuts?

DIANE. No. . .

JACQUES. Well he stole them for some one else, like you with that paper. [*He snatches it.*] Thanks.

DIANE. No, you little brute. You can't do that.

JACQUES. Can't I? You watch.

DIANE. Give it back? [*They struggle.*

JACQUES. I'm dashed if I do. Violet . . catch.

VIOLET. Don't drag me in. I'm a neutral.

JACQUES [*holding the paper in a crumpled mass high over his head*]. Do you think I'm going to marry a neutral? [*To* DIANE, *who is jumping for the paper and just failing to reach it*] Down, Fido. Down!

DIANE. Who are you calling Fido—gorilla!

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Children, don't be rough. . . . Diane, dear! [*They separate.*

VAN EYSEN. I can see I shall enjoy reading my paper this morning.

[JACQUES, *a little conscience-stricken, smooths out the crumpled paper, and, unfolding it, conceals himself completely behind it.* DIANE *watches him with sisterly scorn.*

DIANE. Impression of a country gentleman studying the agricultural depression. Secluded and very dignified.

JACQUES [*suddenly serious. From behind the paper*]. . . . Good Lord!

MADAME VAN EYSEN. What is it, dear.

JACQUES [*dropping the paper, and looking at them in turn*]. . . . War!

DIANE. What? . . Oh, yes, between Greenland and Patagonia. You don't catch me.

JACQUES. Seriously, it's war!

VIOLET. War? What fun! Are we in it?

[*The others are all serious.*

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Fun? What do you mean, child?

VIOLET. Oh, a war's awful fun, Madame Van Eysen. Like fox-hunting, only more so. Uncle Harry—mother's brother, you know—

ot the D.S.O. at Ladysmith. He simply loved it. They had a wonderful time.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Your South African campaign wasn't a war at all, my dear. You don't know what war means.

VAN EYSEN. What's this, Jacques? Let me see the paper. This country isn't involved, surely?

JACQUES. No. But we're in between them. . . . Here you are!

[*He gives the paper to* VAN EYSEN.

VAN EYSEN. Oh, well, it's only an ultimatum. This won't come to anything, you know. The Financial World won't permit wars nowadays. Can't afford it. Civilization's far too complex and interlocked. Countries have to do this kind of thing from time to time to blow off steam. But there's always a way out. They leave a loophole. Statesmen aren't fools.

JACQUES. Where do you suggest the loophole is in this instance?

VAN EYSEN. Oh, well, without knowing all the details how can I possibly tell you that?

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Yes, but what is the news? What's happened? If there's going to be a war oughtn't we all to go over to England or America or somewhere until it's over? It's not very comfortable to feel that one's in between two peoples at war. . . . I can remember 1870!

VAN EYSEN. There's not going to be a war at all. It's only this fuss about the Balkans. It's been in the papers for days. No one takes the Balkans seriously. Goes back to the Vienna Congress.

JACQUES. Curious thing about wars. There always seems to be the seed of a future war carefully planted in the Peace Settlement.

VAN EYSEN. Nonsense, boy. The statesmen know what they're about.

JACQUES. That's just it. They do know what they're about. "War is the statesman's game, the priest's delight, the lawyer's jest, the hired assassin's trade. . . ."

VAN EYSEN. Who wrote that rubbish?

JACQUES. The English poet, Shelley.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. Shelley was an atheist.

DIANE. That only means he had no time for the Church.

VAN EYSEN. Well, a great many quite sensible people in France and here too for that matter don't see eye to eye with the Pope, shall we say? But we can't have——

MADAME VAN EYSEN. My husband! Our children and I are good Catholics. Please don't say things it will be our duty to tell Father Laurence; and make yourself look silly when the good father comes to dinner next Sunday!

VAN EYSEN. Well, well, as you please about that. It's unimportant.

It doesn't matter. . . . But this rubbish about war is quite another thing. A hired assassin's trade! Why, confound it, I was in the Reserve Corps of Officers for years. Am I a hired assassin?

JACQUES. You never went to war.

VAN EYSEN. Was that my fault? We did our training. I remember the drill now. Shoulder arms. Right turn. The Company will advance. . . . We were ready to go to war at any moment. In the regimental mess we used to toast the glorious day when——

DIANE [*who has wandered over to the window*]. I say—excuse my interrupting . . . there's something funny over there.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. You oughtn't to interrupt your father, dear. What do you mean—funny?

DIANE. On the far side of the park palings there are the most extraordinary flashes of sunlight. Jacques, come here.

VAN EYSEN. Reaping-machine going down to the fields.

JACQUES. . . . It's not. By George! Father, I suppose it's impossible for an invasion to have taken place?

VAN EYSEN. Good heavens, boy, your historical knowledge is lamentable. Don't you know this country has been under a guaranteed treaty of permanent neutrality for a hundred years? And why should an invasion have taken place?

JACQUES. Well, Diane's flashes look to me like the glint of cavalry lance-heads.

VAN EYSEN [*rising wrathfully*]. Those confounded militia people. They're manœuvring in my property without leave. I won't have it. Ring the bell and send out and tell them—— No, I'll go myself. Marie, get my hat and stick.

DIANE. But they're coming in at the gate. Look, Jacques.

JACQUES. Those aren't our uniforms. We wear khaki, not field-grey.

VAN EYSEN. It's a practical joke. Those infernal students at the University. They're always up to this sort of thing. I'll give them something they don't expect. Get my hat and stick, Marie.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. But if they're University students you surely won't be angry, Charles? Let's send them out some wine and fruit.

VAN EYSEN. You don't understand, Marie. Property is property! People mustn't trespass without leave, and then, of course, it isn't trespass—I insist——

[*The telephone-bell suddenly peals through the house. They stare at each other in silence. The bell rings again. There is something ominous in its clamour.*

VAN EYSEN. Why doesn't some one attend to that thing?

DIANE. . . . I'll go. [*She hurries into the hall.*

VAN EYSEN. What on earth are the servants up to?

[*The bell is cut off by the lifting of the receiver.* DIANE'S *voice in the hall.*

DIANE. Hello! Yes. Yes. What? They've done *what*? Invasion . . . the frontier . . . Father . . . *Father!* [*She reappears in the doorway, wide-eyed and pale.*] Father . . . the most awful thing . . .

VAN EYSEN. . . . Well, don't get hysterical about it! . . .

[*The door to the kitchen is flung open. The* MAIDS *scurry in.*

ONE OF THEM. Oh, sir! Oh, madame! There's foreign soldiers in the kitchen taking the eggs and butter, and carrying on terrible.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. But they can't be foreigners, Julie.

JULIE. But they are, madame. You can't understand a word they say——

VAN EYSEN. This is too much of a good thing altogether——

[*A stern stranger in an officer's uniform enters the room.* JULIE *chokes back a scream of fright.*

THE STRANGER. Is this the White Château?

VAN EYSEN. It is. Well?

THE STRANGER. Are you the master of the house?

VAN EYSEN. The master of the . . . What the devil's this mummery? Who are you, pray?

THE STRANGER. I am the officer in command of B Squadron of the Black Skull Uhlans. What is your name?

VAN EYSEN. Black fiddlesticks! Some ridiculous prank! What? . . . Black stuff and nonsense!

THE OFFICER. If you insult my uniform I'll have you thrashed with the flat of a sabre. [*A gasp of astonishment from* VAN EYSEN.] I advise you to be civil and answer my questions. What is your name?

VAN EYSEN. Charles Van Eysen.

THE OFFICER. Is this house your property?

VAN EYSEN. Of course it's my property. Do you think I stole it or picked it up in the street?

THE OFFICER. It is better to avoid flippancy or sarcasm. The others will leave the room. They may go into the garden; but if they go beyond the garden without permission my men will bring them back —not always gently. Now go.

MADAME VAN EYSEN. But——

THE OFFICER. Madame. This is war. You must obey me. Go!

VAN EYSEN. Do as he says, Marie. Go, all of you. . . . [*They depart.*] Now, sir . . . what does this mean?

THE OFFICER. I have said. It is war. We are on our way to surprise the enemy.

VAN EYSEN. But you can't do that. Our territory is guaranteed. It isn't fair.

THE OFFICER. I've no time to argue. . . . How many rooms are there in this house?

VAN EYSEN. What's that to do with you?

THE OFFICER. Do you want me to send a file of men to count? I warn you they might not be very careful of your property.

VAN EYSEN. There are twenty-four bedrooms.

THE OFFICER. And living-rooms—how many?

VAN EYSEN. Six.

THE OFFICER. And, of course, servants' quarters in addition?

VAN EYSEN. Naturally.

THE OFFICER. Very good. You will keep two bedrooms and one sitting-room for yourself and your family. The remainder is requisitioned for the use of the Army. Of course you will receive the usual billeting rate of one crown a day for the use of each room. Now, about stables——

VAN EYSEN. But, Captain—this is most high-handed. It isn't reasonable.

THE OFFICER. Take my advice. Don't give trouble. Or I'll pack the lot of you out of the house at the point of a lance. . . . Now, about stables——

VAN EYSEN. I can't spare you any stable room.

THE OFFICER [*with a nasty laugh*]. I think you'll find it possible. . . . My information is that you've stabling for fifty or sixty horses. I don't mind you keeping a couple of stalls for your own beasts, but I need the rest.

VAN EYSEN. But, Captain, I can't turn out my valuable blood-stock to make room for your troopers' horses!

THE OFFICER. Blood-stock! Oho! Those are needed, my friend. Requisitioned. How many? [*A sudden uproar in the back of the house. The sound of a shot and a yell. A second shot.*] What the devil's this? If your servants are giving trouble, sir, they'll pay for it.

[*The uproar continues. Some one is shouting "Let me go—let me go."*

VAN EYSEN. If your men are misbehaving, I shall complain—I shall complain——

THE OFFICER. Complain! You fool! [*The noise has continued, and is now just outside the room.* JACQUES *is dragged into the room by a couple of troopers and a* SERGEANT. *The women of the house follow in petrified horror.*] What's all this?

JACQUES [*struggling*]. He kissed her, I tell you. Don't do that, you——

THE SERGEANT. Shut his mouth.

[*Chokings and gurglings from the prisoner.*

VAN EYSEN. Good God! That's my son they've got hold of. Let him go at once.

THE OFFICER. Be quiet, sir! . . . Sergeant, what's all this?

THE SERGEANT. Sir . . . the prisoner has shot Trooper Müller.

THE OFFICER. Is he badly wounded.

THE SERGEANT. He's killed, sir. [*A little pause.*

THE OFFICER [*to* JACQUES]. What have you to say for yourself?

JACQUES. Your trooper saw my sister and my *fiancée* in the garden. He went up behind them . . . took hold of my *fiancée* round the waist . . and kissed her! [*He pauses.*

THE OFFICER [*icy*]. Go on.

JACQUES. I ran up and pulled him off. He struggled. I knocked him down. He drew a revolver on me. I got it away from him. In the struggle it went off. He rushed at me with his sword, and I shot him.

THE OFFICER. You know that firing on the troops is the most serious offence a civilian can commit!

JACQUES [*hotly*]. You don't seem to understand. . . . He kissed her.

THE OFFICER. What the devil does a kiss matter? You should have complained to me. I'm responsible for the discipline of my men. And what's more, it's my duty to protect them. . . . I could have you shot out of hand for this. But I'll give you a chance. I commit you to be tried by court martial.

JACQUES. But I tell you he kissed her—damn him. Would you stand by and see a beastly drunken brute——

THE OFFICER. You can explain all that to the court. . . . Take him away.

[*Click of heels from the escort. They march out with* JACQUES *between them.*

VAN EYSEN. . . . For God's sake! . . . They'll understand the boy didn't mean anything?

THE OFFICER. He'll get a fair trial and the sentence he deserves. . . .

MADAME VAN EYSEN [*weeping*]. Oh, my son . . . my son. . . .

[DIANE, *conquering her own tears, endeavours to calm her mother's grief.*

THE OFFICER. Well—you know the phrase! *C'est la guerre.* Personally I'm very sorry. But there it is.

DIANE. You'll tell them that it wasn't his fault?

THE OFFICER. I shall not be there to tell them anything. I shall be in the line with my men. . . I shall make a report.

DIANE. But you'll say in your report——

THE OFFICER. Mademoiselle, you must not interrogate me.

VAN EYSEN. No, no, no, of course. But we must know where we stand. You see that, don't you? We're surely entitled to know what the boy has to expect . . . and so on.

THE OFFICER. The punishment for the offence is death. [*Shrugging*] Of course they may take a more lenient view.

VAN EYSEN. . . . The hired assassin's trade! Oh, my God! No, no, Captain, I didn't mean that. I'm sure they'll be fair. Of course they'll be fair. . . .

DIANE. Fair! There's nothing fair in war.

THE OFFICER [*to* VAN EYSEN]. You must control your daughter.

VAN EYSEN. Yes, yes. Be quiet, my dear.

DIANE. If you think I'm afraid——

VIOLET [*pulling her back*]. For God's sake don't provoke the man.

THE OFFICER [*unimpressed. He ignores her and addresses* VAN EYSEN]. Now, sir, about the billeting arrangements. This room will be an officers' mess. Is there a second kitchen? [*A knock. The* ORDERLY SERGEANT *enters and salutes.*] Well, what is it?

THE ORDERLY SERGEANT. Message from the Adjutant to resume the march in two hours, sir.

THE OFFICER. Right. Send for the Sergeant-Major, and warn the prisoner's escort. [*To* VAN EYSEN] We march in two hours. You come along with me and hand over that blood-stock. [VAN EYSEN *hesitates.*] Don't make me use unpleasant arguments.

[VAN EYSEN *follows him—a broken man.*

MADAME VAN EYSEN [*mechanically*]. . . . He'll be brave. I know he'll be brave. . . .

## SECOND SCENE

*Music*

*A great slow theme, given out by the basses and taken up by the rest of the strings, suggests the steady forward march of a mighty army. A few bars indicate the cantering of the cavalry patrols, broken in upon by the clatter of machine-guns and the sharp bark of field-artillery. Always the army moves onward like some relentless piece of machinery. This theme dies away and is replaced by one suggesting the distant boom of the sea breaking on a reef. The voice of the* Chronicler *is heard speaking through the music.*

The Chronicler

Roll onward like an angry sea,
Wave upon wave and host on host,
Hurling your strength at the enemy
As the hurricane batters a rockbound coast:
Though the seas sweep on yet the rocks remain
And the sea is thrown back where the cliff stands fast;
For the sea and your legions, that storm in vain,
Failing alike shall fall at last.

*The music stops*

Behind the tide of marching men
The High Command keeps sleepless ward,
Serenely proving that the pen
Is ever mightier than the sword.
The Grand Headquarters of it all
In some great mansion, once alight
With children's voices, loud and small,
Now bare and bleak, directs the fight. . . .

*A thread of music*

Clipped grey hair for a baby's curls,
Gleam of weapons for gleam of pearls—
And in my lady's deserted bed
A grim old general in gold and red.

*A bar of martial music fading away*

*The scene is the same as the first—with a difference. There is an indescribably unkempt air about the place—like a man who has been too*

*lazy to shave. The walls are hung with military maps supported anyhow. A festoon of telephone-wires protrudes through the window. The dining-table is a repository for more maps, and another big table with a large chair drawn up to it has been converted into a desk. The Château dining-room is now the office of a commander-in-chief. There is mud on the carpet, and the furniture is scratched and awry.*

*A* STAFF COLONEL *and the* DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF *are at work.*

*The latter is marking the situation report on the big map that faces the* MARSHAL'S *writing-table. The other is collecting papers in a jacket in readiness for the* COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF *to consider them on his arrival.*

*The distant hoot of a motor. The voice of a sentry warning the guard.*

SENTRY'S VOICE. Stand by, the guard! . . Guard, turn out!

STAFF COLONEL. There he is.

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Before time, as usual! I hope he's in a better temper this morning.

SENTRY'S VOICE. Present arms!

STAFF COLONEL. I hope the guard's a bit better turned out. It's too bad the fuss he makes about equipment. Anyone would think we were in barracks instead of on active service.

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. The situation report to-day doesn't leave much doubt about that. We're in for heavy fighting.

SENTRY'S VOICE. To your guard-room! Dis-miss——

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. I'd better tell the chief, I suppose.

[*He leaves the map.*

STAFF COLONEL [*nodding*]. Yes. For heaven's sake don't keep him waiting to-day.

[*The* DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF *hurries out. After a little pause the* COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF *stumps heavily in. A self-important man, firm, inclined to bullying, an excellent soldier. The remaining* STAFF OFFICER *springs stiffly to attention.*

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Good morning. [*Turning and speaking off to his* AIDE-DE-CAMP] Well, did you tell them off?

[*Enter* AIDE-DE-CAMP.

AIDE-DE-CAMP. Yes, Excellency.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. That guard isn't fit to mount over a salvage dump. Send them back to their unit.

AIDE-DE-CAMP. Yes, Excellency.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. You must see that the Headquarters guard is properly turned out! If you can't do it, I'll get some one who can. I won't have this slackness.

[*The* STAFF COLONEL *smiles a superior smile—his hand thrust into his jacket pocket.*

AIDE-DE-CAMP. No, Excellency.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF [*glaring at the* STAFF COLONEL]. No! There are too many people lounging about Headquarters with their hands in their pockets. . . . I won't have it. That'll do.

[*The* STAFF COLONEL *hurriedly comes to attention.*

[*The* AIDE-DE-CAMP *salutes and goes. The* COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF *goes to his table and sits.*

STAFF COLONEL. I've a lot of papers for you to see, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. They must wait. Where's the Chief of Staff?

STAFF COLONEL. He's on his way, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. What time is the Chancellor arriving?

STAFF COLONEL. He's already here, sir. . . . He's rather impatient to see you. He's in the next room.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. I'll see him when I'm ready. [*A knock.*] Who's that?

STAFF COLONEL [*to the door*]. It's the Chief of Staff, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Come in. [*The* CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF *enters with papers under his arm.*] Good morning, General.

CHIEF OF STAFF. Good morning, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Have you got the situation report?

CHIEF OF STAFF. Yes. The advance is slowing down, I'm afraid. The Right Group of Armies have been attacked from the north. They've beaten it off, of course, but the Seventh Army has had too many casualties.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Seventh Army. That's Stolz?

CHIEF OF STAFF. Yes, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Recall him and send a new man. Send that fellow who's been handling the Thirty-sixth Corps so well.

CHIEF OF STAFF. Very good, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. And send up the Fifth Reserve Corps to reinforce the Seventh Army, and take out the divisions that have been cut up. Bring them back to refit. Are the base reinforcements coming up in any strength?

CHIEF OF STAFF. Yes, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Rail them forward as quickly as possible; and wire the Divisional Commanders to devote their whole energy to reorganization. I shall want those divisions very soon. . . . Well, what else?

CHIEF OF STAFF. The Left Group of Armies are up against very difficult country——

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Of course. They've reached the Sambre

River by now. They must force it at once, and turn the enemy's position.

CHIEF OF STAFF. They're doing that, sir. They've got bridges over at two points and three more are being constructed.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Tell the Engineer-in-Chief to go forward himself and take charge of the work; and send up the mobile Reserve of bridging material. We need at least a dozen bridges there. What's the news from the centre?

CHIEF OF STAFF. They're pushing ahead—overcoming all resistance easily. I'm not sure they aren't going too fast for the flanks.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. No harm in that so long as they don't outrun their communications. They must make their own arrangements for flank protection. [*Meeting an unspoken objection*] Don't you see the farther they go the more they take the pressure off the right? Send up Second Reserve Corps to follow the right of the Centre Group and fill any gap that may occur. . . . Is that all? . . . Then I'll see the Chancellor. [*The* STAFF OFFICER *hurries out to get him.*] You'd better give me those situation reports for reference.

CHIEF OF STAFF. Shall I go, sir, while you see him?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. No, stay here. All politicians are the very devil. This fellow is king of all the devils!

STAFF COLONEL [*returning*]. His Excellency the Chancellor. . . .

[*He withdraws.*

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Come in, Chancellor. . . . You know my Chief of Staff?

CHANCELLOR. Yes, of course. How do you do? [*Sits right of table.*] Well, Marshal, how is your great offensive?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Well enough. [*Pause.*] I wish you'd keep your Parliament in order. How do you expect soldiers to fight when the papers print nothing but reports of debates criticizing the High Command and making a fuss about the casualties?

CHANCELLOR. Let them talk. It doesn't affect the Government.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. I'm not thinking of the Government. I'm thinking of my men. It affects them! Undermines their confidence in their leaders and makes them think about their own skins. If irresponsible Deputies can't have the patriotism to hold their tongues, they ought to be imprisoned till the war's over.

CHANCELLOR. That sort of thing's very easy for a soldier to say, and impossible for a modern Government to do. Besides—the casualties *are* heavy. It's unsettling the nation!

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. They'll be far heavier before long. They're nothing to worry about yet!

CHANCELLOR. Nothing to worry about? The last week's return showed ten thousand killed and wounded.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. What's that in an army of two millions? About a hundred per division. About seven per battalion. A bagatelle!

CHANCELLOR. Well, you must manage somehow to soften the effect. To the public it reads as though whole regiments had been wiped out. . . And you talk of even greater loss of life. You must really soften the effect.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Any 'softening' of the returns that you want must be done at your end. My Adjutant-General has quite enough work in collecting and compiling the information without doctoring it as well. . . . And as for further casualties—just listen, Chancellor! We've been at war less than a month. No engagement of real importance has taken place yet. The enemy has an army at least as large as ours, and nearly if not quite as well trained. He won't retreat for ever——

CHANCELLOR [*supercilious*]. I am not in school, with your junior officers, Marshal.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Easy enough to tell that, sir, from the things you say about war! . . . I hope the Government hasn't got false ideas about what they've embarked on. When the enemy stands his ground, as he will before long—the Seventh Army was fairly heavily engaged this morning, for instance—when that happens the casualties will be multiplied by five or even ten.

CHANCELLOR [*beginning to orate*]. The Government wish you to understand their position, Marshal. That is why I am here. The people expected that with so mighty an instrument as our Army, led by so renowned a commander as yourself, the campaign would be short, swift, and triumphant. They—we all—expected a decisive battle almost immediately. Instead you are, as you say, pursuing the enemy without bringing him to battle. The casualties are mounting at this alarming rate. And there's a general opinion that—well——

[*An expressive shrug.*

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. There's a general opinion that it's my fault. Eh? Well, put some one else in my place.

CHANCELLOR. What?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Put some one else in my place!

CHANCELLOR. No, no, no! The Government of course has the most implicit confidence in the Commander-in-Chief. But the people are really becoming uneasy for want of a victory to take their minds off the casualty lists.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. You want me to win a great battle, and you want me to do it bloodlessly. Civilians always ask a soldier to do the impossible, and they always resent being told that miracles are the work of God, not man. You can't fight battles without killing soldiers!

[*A little pause for this to soak in.*] And the bigger the battle the more you must be prepared to sacrifice. . . . [*A knock on the door.*] Who's that?

CHIEF OF STAFF [*unlatching the door*]. Give it to me. . . . Good heavens! [*He holds an opened telegram.*

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. . . . Well . . . what is it?

CHIEF OF STAFF. The Seventh Army's broken, sir. The Tenth Corps is cut off. General Bessel's whole Army Group is set back in disorder.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. That fellow Bessel doesn't know how to command a Group of Armies. . . . Go and take command yourself. Wire to that fellow from the Thirty-sixth Corps to join you and put him in command of Seventh Army. Tell your Deputy to carry on for you here till I appoint a new Chief of Staff. . . . And see you hold your ground! Good luck.

CHIEF OF STAFF. Very good, sir.

[*He turns and hurries out without more parley.*

CHANCELLOR. Is this a disaster, Marshal?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. No. It's the battle you wanted so badly. [*He strikes a bell. An* ORDERLY *clicks his heels in the doorway.*] Orderly, send for my car and my *aide-de-camp* at once. And I want the Deputy Chief of Staff.

[*Enter a* GENERAL OFFICER. *The newcomer is a thin, saturnine soldier of early middle age.*

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. I'm here, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Good. You're to carry on for the Chief of General Staff whom I've appointed to command the Right Group of Armies. Notify the War Ministry of the change and send a wire recalling General Bessel. I'll see him when I come back from the line.

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Yes, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Tell the Camp Commandant to be in readiness to move Headquarters back in case this situation gets worse. Can't direct a battle from the middle of it. . . . Are there any further wires?

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Yes, sir. I'm afraid the remnants of the Tenth Corps have been captured. And a new attack has developed at the junction of the Centre and Right Groups.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. I said the Second Reserve Corps was to be sent there to reinforce. See that's done immediately. And tell the Centre Group to halt on their left and centre, and counter-attack the right with every available division. [*A knock.*] Who's that?

[*A* SIGNALLER *enters.*

ORDERLY. Signal orderly, sir.

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Message? Bring it here. [*He takes it.*

ORDERLY. Sign on the form, sir, please.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Damn the form. [*To* DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF] Well, what's it say? [*The* AIDE-DE-CAMP *comes in unobtrusively.*

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF [*reading*]. "Our passage of Sambre River met by strong counter-attack. In view information from right flank have withdrawn my advance guards and await orders." It's from the Left Group.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. That flank's safe at all events. Tell him to dig in along the river and destroy the bridges. Detach two corps from his right, and rail them to the Right Army Group. Now, then, is my car ready?

THE AIDE-DE-CAMP. Yes, sir.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. Right . . . Chancellor, I must go. The Acting Chief of Staff will give you any news at lunch-time. Tell the Government not to worry. The situation is excellent, and I shall attack at once.

CHANCELLOR. Yes. You'll keep the casualties down, won't you?

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF [*as he goes*]. Not by refusing battle! That's the best way to increase them.

[*He stumps out. The* AIDE-DE-CAMP *follows.*

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Will your Excellency wait here—or——

CHANCELLOR. I shan't stay for lunch. The Cabinet will want to discuss the situation. . . . Would you send for my car?

[*The* DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF *rings the bell.*

[*An* ORDERLY *comes to the door.*

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF [*over his shoulder*]. Orderly, the Chancellor's car.

CHANCELLOR. Thank you. . . . [*Pause.*] Do you know—there's something familiar to me about this house. I wonder why. . . . What is the name of that small town in the hollow there?

[*He goes to the window.*

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Wervers. This place is known as the White Château.

CHANCELLOR. The White Château. Of course. Why, I once stayed here. Oh, years and years ago. It belonged to a family called—there, I've forgotten the name. They were friends of my brother's. I didn't know them well.

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Van Eysen.

CHANCELLOR. That's it. What an interesting coincidence! Dear me, my brother was godfather to one of the children. Jolly little chap. A boy.

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Jacques by name?

CHANCELLOR. Quite right. It was Jacques. How odd that you should know!

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Your brother's godson was accused of firing on the troops after the occupation.

CHANCELLOR. What? A mistake, of course!

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. He was found guilty—and shot for it.

CHANCELLOR. . . . Shot! What a terrible thing! Was that absolutely necessary, General?

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. It was absolutely necessary. A gross case. He killed a trooper. He was tried by court martial.

CHANCELLOR. Then . . . there's no more to be said. My brother will feel this deeply.

AN ORDERLY [*at the door*]. His Excellency's car is waiting.

CHANCELLOR. I'll go at once. [*He becomes the statesman again as he turns to bid farewell to the* DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF.] Good-bye. Impress upon the Marshal the importance of avoiding casualties. Not for sentimental reasons—of course sentiment can't enter into the matter. Treat it simply as a question of practical policy. You soldiers must be guided a little by us. We have our fingers on the public pulse. A quick decision. That's what's wanted. A quick decision! . . Good-bye.

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Good-bye, Excellency. [*The door shuts.*] . . . Wind-bag! [*He strikes the bell.*] Orderly, bring all messages in here, and put me through to the Centre Group Commander on the telephone. Send for the Camp Commandant. And ask the Director of Operations——

STAFF COLONEL [*hurrying in with a message in his hand*]. God! Von Groner! That fool in the centre has overrun himself. They've attacked at the junction with the left——

DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF. Almighty! . . . What did I tell you? He's bungled it. He's bungled it. [*He moves to the maps.*] We must move Headquarters immediately. . . . Where's the Camp Commandant? [*Hectoring*] I said I wanted the Camp Commandant! [*The* ORDERLY *hurries out.*] . . . This means retreat, my friend. Retreat at full speed!

## THIRD SCENE

*Music*

THE CHRONICLER

An army in prolonged retreat;
Trudge, trudge, of tired feet;
Trudge, trudge, through rain and sludge,
Trudge—trudge—trudge—trudge.
Heavy heart and drooping head,
Scanty rations, scantier bed,
Failing strength and dizzy brain . . .
Trudge—trudge. On again. . . .

Long since departed G.H.Q.
From the Château (with its whiteness faded),
Corps, division, brigade, passed through
And left it, when they each withdrew,
A little more degraded.
Next the pursuing enemy appears,
Drives in the rearguard posted in the gardens,
Rifles the house for souvenirs,
And, as resistance hardens,
Throws up trenches, blows up, out of hand,
Whatever might impede the field of fire,
Runs out entanglements of steel and wire—
And leaves the Château stark . . .
In No Man's Land.

*The scene is a sector of breastwork roughly duck-boarded by way of protection from the all-pervading mud. The 'line' is sited along a low natural embankment crowned with the stumps of pollarded willows blasted by shell-fire. This at first sight seems a dangerous place to build a breastwork, but reflection furnishes the answer to this objection —namely, that a line of naked breastwork in an open plain would be an even more obvious artillery target. For with movement reduced to a minimum there is always a chance that the enemy may fail to observe that the line of willows is occupied.*

*The proximity of the willows furnishes this bit of trench-line with its name—Willow Walk. Neatly painted in black on a white board by the Brigade pioneers, this sign has been affixed at the junction with*

*the communication trench Willow Alley. In the traverse beyond the junction there is a Lewis-gun post. Beyond that a 'baby elephant,' splinter-proof, has been let into the embankment to form a trench shelter. A white board affixed to the sandbagged side describes it as "Support Company H.Q." Some unofficial signwriter has embellished the lid of a ration-box with the legend "The Cave of Harmony" and fastened this above the entrance.*

*In the middle distance the White Château rises out of the plain, gaunt and shell-scarred. Beyond is desolation as far as the eye can see.*

*The sector is occupied by a British battalion. B Company in support holds the line of Willow Walk. A small group of 'other ranks' are cleaning up after breakfast. One is affectionately 'pulling through' and polishing his gleaming rifle. Another in grey shirt-sleeves, with braces slipped on either side, is shaving with the aid of a trench periscope fixed on a bayonet. An officer's servant is heating a plate of food over a charcoal brazier. The man who is cleaning his rifle is accompanying his task with a snatch of trench song. His voice cracks on a high note.*

THE LEWIS-GUN SERGEANT [*putting his head round the traverse*]. If you want ter make that 'ideous noise, for Gawd's sake go back 'ome to the Albert Hall.

THE SINGER. Nobody appreciates music—not in this trench.

THE MAN WHO IS SHAVING. Wot you got to sing about Gawd knows! That top note of yours ain't 'arf made a mess of my face.

[*Turning, he displays a bleeding gash.*

THE SINGER. That ain't no worse than wot nature done to it already.

THE SHAVER. Ain't you witty? Bin readin' *Comic Cuts*, I suppose. . . . If I 'ave any more of your lip——

SERGEANT. . . . 'Ere, 'ere, 'ere! You keep your bit of 'ate for the 'Un, you two.

THE SHAVER. Which I wouldn't mind doin', sergeant, if I ever sore a bleedin' 'Un. . . . I bin out 'ere four months now and a fat lot of 'Uns I seen, let me tell yer. All I seen is mud and shells and blinkin' ration fatigues.

SERGEANT. You don't know when you're well off, you don't.

THE SINGER. That's Noo Army, that is. Ain't got no patience. All want to be promoted Commander-in-Chief in a fortnight. [*Addressing the shaver*] Me, see? I bin with this battalion seven years—but you don't see me shovin' meself forward. Not Bill Waters. Ain't that right, sergeant?

SERGEANT. Yes, me lad, it is; but it's time you was qualifying for the stripe.

THE SINGER. I ain't got the exy-kyootiv capacity, sergeant.

SERGEANT. You've got plenty of lip, though.

THE SINGER [*wickedly*]. That's a recommendation for the stripe, ain't it, sergeant?

SERGEANT. That's a recommendation for the clink, me lad, an' don't you ferget it!

THE SHAVER [*reminiscing*]. Well—I 'ad the chance of goin' with one of our Territorial battalions to India. An' I'm sorry now as I didn't. . . . You ever bin on the frontears, sergeant?

SERGEANT. My lad, when this battalion was warned for the Front, we was at Dagshai. An' let me tell you, if we was there now you'd 'ave some fatigues worth talkin' about. You don't know when you're lucky, you don't.

THE SINGER. 'E wants a cooshy billet.

THE SHAVER [*indignant*]. I don't want nothing of the kind. But I come out 'ere for a war—an' all I get is livin' under the earth like a blinkin' weasel.

THE SINGER. Well, if you're so 'ellfired anxious to see a live 'Un, why don't yer break yerself in like by 'aving a look at a few dead 'uns? Look 'ere . . . over the top 'ere between the front line an' that there Shattoo there's 'undreds of 'Uns—wot copped it in the show 'ere last March.

THE SHAVER. . . . Gawd, d'you think I'm a body-snatcher?

THE SINGER. Ah, body-snatcher my foot! What the 'ell's the good of talkin' like a motter in a Christmas cracker? Me an' Brady was out last night—picking up things. Course they're gettin a bit worked out now—but it's surprising what you do find. There was one tremenduous great 'Un over there by C Company's Aid Post——

SERGEANT. Ah! I seen some good 'Uns too! Well preserved, was 'e?

THE SINGFR. 'Ee was a beautiful corpse, I must say. Not 'ardly damaged at all. 'E 'ad a lovely automatic what I've sold to my orficer; an' one of them posh 'elmets with a spike; an' a wonderful good pair of boots.

THE SHAVER. Which you're wearin' them now, I suppose!

THE SINGER. Well—they wasn't no good to 'im.

THE SHAVER. Ain't you afraid 'e'll 'aunt you?

THE SINGER. Erch! 'Aunt me! You ought to go to yer gal's school.

SERGEANT. 'Ere, that's enough, you two. Private Mason, you're for sanitary fatigue, ain't you? Better report to the pioneer corp'ral. An' you Private Waters——

THE SINGER. I'm on orficer's mess duty, sergeant.

SERGEANT. Well, get on with it.

[*A slim young officer enters from the communication trench. He carries a long trench-pole*—LIEUTENANT BARRINGTON.

BARRINGTON. Sergeant Andrews?

SERGEANT. Yes, Mr Barrington, sir.

BARRINGTON. Keep your fellows down. They're sniping a bit from the barricade on the Château road.

SERGEANT. Very good, sir. I'll go along and pass it down, sir.

[*He departs.*

[BARRINGTON *proceeds to the dugout door, opens the blanket.* BRAITHWAITE, *the Company Commander, and* MATHESON, *a subaltern, are revealed.*

[WATERS *the servant goes to his brazier and begins dishing food on a plate.*

BRAITHWAITE [*yawning*]. Hullo, Badger. What's the news?

BARRINGTON. They've oc-occupied the Château with a machine-gun post. It f-fires right down our front line.

BRAITHWAITE. Always said it was idiotic not to run the trenches out in front of the Château. We could easily have made the ground before the line stabilized.

MATHESON. Easily. I lived in it in style with my platoon for three days when they were still retreating. Got some marvellous Burgundy in a cellar that had been overlooked

BARRINGTON. But of course it's a nasty artillery target to have in your f-front line. Other side's b-bound to register all their g-guns on it.

BRAITHWAITE. Just as bad having it in No Man's Land. Then you get socks from both sides. Our fellows put ten six-inch just over B post last night.

BARRINGTON. Well, what are we goin' to do about this machine-gun? . . . Any b-breakfast left?

WATERS [*advancing from the brazier*]. Yes, sir—yours 'as bin kep' 'ot.

BARRINGTON. Kept hot! Lord, we do live in luxury these days! . . . Any mail up? [WATERS, *having spread a place for him with much clatter of enamel plates, now returns to the brazier.*] Thanks, Waters.

MATHESON. Yes. There are some letters for you somewhere, Badger. Waters has got them. Wat-ters.

WATERS. Sir?

MATHESON. Bring Mr Barrington's letters.

WATERS. I was just fetchin' 'em, sir. . . . [*To* BARRINGTON] There's only two and a paper, sir.

BARRINGTON. Right. Thanks, Waters. [*He takes them. The sound of rending envelopes. As he reads*] Good L-lord, oh, I say! . . .

[COURTNEY, *the junior subaltern, enters.*

COURTNEY. Braithwaite, this has come through from the Adjutant.

[*He gives a written message to the* COMPANY COMMANDER.

BRAITHWAITE. Right. [*He reads.*] Oh! . . . Colonel's on his way here, you fellows. Buck up with your breakfast, Badger!

BARRINGTON. Eh? Half a m-minute. . . . Good L-lord! . . . Really!

COURTNEY. Why—what's the matter with the old Badger?

MATHESON. The King's made him a duke. The Duke of Badger, Earl Stoat, and Viscount Guinea-pig!

COURTNEY. Rot. He's been given command of a New Army division—General Badger, C.B.

BRAITHWAITE. Companion of the Bath. Jolly appropriate for a Badger!

COURTNEY. Come on, Badger—don't keep it to yourself.

MATHESON. Share it with B Company, man.

THE BADGER. Half a minute, y-you cha-chaps. Good Lord!

BRAITHWAITE. What is it, Badger? Nothing serious, I hope.

THE BADGER. Oh, serious? Well, I don't know . . . er . . . As a m-matter of fact—my wife's got twins. . . .

COURTNEY. Hurray for the Badger and the little Badgers!

BRAITHWAITE. Shut up, you fellows. [*Silence.*] Badger, you'd like to go on leave, wouldn't you?

THE BADGER. Be rather fun. W-wouldn't it?

BRAITHWAITE. Times are pretty quiet. I think it might be wangled. . . . Buck up! Finish your breakfast. Good Lord, you needn't gobble like that!

THE BADGER [*aggrieved*]. Hang it, you just told me to hurry! . . . Look here, what are we goin' to do about this machine-gun post? I've asked you three times.

BRAITHWAITE. Get the heavies to shoot if I can.

MATHESON. Oh, do, Braithwaite. A place that size has got no business in No Man's Land. One of these days some fat old general will come up the line for the first time in his life and insist on sending a patrol over to count the rooms or something equally futile, and——

COURTNEY. Rather bad luck on the owner to get it all blown to bits!

BRAITHWAITE. Oh, hell! He ought to have thought of that before he built such a great barn of a place.

BARRINGTON. Do you know—my wife's c-cousin was engaged to a fellow from these parts, when the War broke out. He lived at a p-place called the White Château.

BRAITHWAITE. Well?

BARRINGTON. Be damned extraordinary if this was the same place—wouldn't it?

BRAITHWAITE. Altogether too damned extraordinary, old boy.

BARRINGTON. Why? All s-sorts of odd things happen.

MATHESON. Not that sort of thing!

COURTNEY [*siding with the* BADGER]. That's just the sort of thing that does happen. . . . [*To* BARRINGTON] What became of the chap she was engaged to?

BARRINGTON. H-horrible business! He was shot as a spy or something.

MATHESON. What—by our side?

BARRINGTON. No, you great f-fool. By the other side, of course! [*The* COLONEL *and an* ORDERLY *enter, walking along the trench. They are followed by a* GUNNER OFFICER.] It was a bloody awful affair. He got into a scrap with some f-filthy trooper and——

COLONEL [*from the trench*]. Are you there, Braithwaite?

BRAITHWAITE. The Colonel! [*Calling*] Shall I come out, sir—or will you come in?

COLONEL. I think you'd better come out. It looks rather a tight fit for me. [BRAITHWAITE *joins him in the trench.*] Morning, Braithwaite. Company O.K.?

BRAITHWAITE. Morning, Colonel. Yes. Everything's all right. They've put a machine-gun post in the Château.

COLONEL. By George, that's lucky. And here's the Artillery *liaison* officer come up with me to look for targets. Do you two know each other? Williams—Braithwaite.

BOTH. Morning!

COLONEL. Where's this machine-gun? . . . Are you through to your battery, Williams?

WILLIAMS. Shall be in a couple of minutes, sir. My linesman's just fixing the telephone. But you'll want the heavies for this. I'll get the battery to put me through.

COLONEL. Right. Fix it up your own way. [WILLIAMS *beckons his linesman, and they set to work on the telephone.*] Who reported this, Braithwaite?

BRAITHWAITE. The Badger, sir—Barrington.

COLONEL. Better have him out if he's in there.

BRAITHWAITE. Yes, sir—I'll call him. . . . Just before I get him sir, may I . . .?

COLONEL. Well?

BRAITHWAITE. Do you think the old Badger could have a spot of leave, sir? His wife's just had twins.

COLONEL. Barrington's wife. Ye-es . . . things are pretty quiet. I think perhaps he might. . . . Call him out.

BRAITHWAITE. Keep down, sir. They got a direct hit this morning. [*Calling*] Badger, the Colonel wants you. [BARRINGTON *unstows himself from the table and scrambles out into the trench.*] Awfully decent of you, Colonel.

COLONEL. Oh, rot. . . . Hullo, Barrington. What's this you've been up to?

BARRINGTON. Oh, you mean the ma-machine-gun, sir.

COLONEL. Machine-gun! No. I mean your family.

BARRINGTON. I know, sir. Isn't it awful?

COLONEL. Well, I suppose you'd like to go and see them?

BARRINGTON. Be rather f-fun, sir. Wouldn't it?

COLONEL. All right. Come down this afternoon. I'll give you a cup of tea and the Adjutant'll give you a leave warrant. . . . Now, about this machine-gun.

BARRINGTON [*stuttering worse than ever in his delight*]. Thanks m-most aw-aw-awfully, sir.

COLONEL. . . . About this machine-gun, Barrington—you located it, did you?

BARRINGTON. Yes, sir. [*Tut-tut-tut-tut!*] There! It's firing now.

COLONEL. Know where it is?

BARRINGTON. Yes, sir. I sp-potted the flash. It's in the b-basement of the Château f-firing through the window.

COLONEL [*turning to the* GUNNER OFFICER]. You hear that, Williams? Can you deal with that?

WILLIAMS [*looking up*]. Oh, Lord, yes, sir! We'll give Granny some exercise. The twelve-inch, sir. And there are some nine-two's that'd be the better for a bit of shooting!

COLONEL. Can you see from here—or must we go into the front line?

BARRINGTON. No. You can see from here, sir. [*Pointing.*

COLONEL. Let me have a squint.

BRAITHWAITE. Don't show yourself, Colonel. Their snipers are pretty hot.

[*The* COLONEL *against advice hoists himself up. Crack of a distant rifle. The* COLONEL *descends again.*

COLONEL. I don't call that hot. Didn't go near me. . . . Yes, I see the place you mean, Barrington. Did you see it, Williams?

BARRINGTON. It fires right d-down our trench, sir.

COLONEL. We'll soon put that right. Now, Williams, are you through on your telephone?

WILLIAMS [*to the linesman*]. Have you got them yet?

LINESMAN [*looking up*]. Through, sir, yes.

WILLIAMS. I'm through, sir.

COLONEL. Can you turn the heavies on?

WILLIAMS. I'll get on to them and see. [*Buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz!*] What's the nearest inhabited trench?

BRAITHWAITE. B Post. Six hundred yards from the Château.

WILLIAMS. Oh, that's all right. They're safe enough. Hullo, hullo. Don Battery? I want heavies. Yes, please. [*Addressing the others*

*while waiting to be put through*] They'll be glad of an excuse to do this place in. [*Another burst of machine-gun fire.*

BARRINGTON. There! They're at it again. Those poor de-devils in the f-front line simply daren't move.

WILLIAMS [*into the telephone*]. Hallo! Is that heavies? Is that Major Reynolds? Williams speaking. Look here, Reynolds, the infantry want some hate on the White Château. K seventeen, Beer two-nine! You know the place! You want to do it in! . . . Anything doing? . . . There's a machine-gun nest moved into the basement, so it needs the heaviest possible. What? . . . Oh, splendid fellow! . . . He's going to turn on the twelve-inch, sir, and the nine-two's as well.

COLONEL. That ought to brighten the basement a bit. When will he shoot?

WILLIAMS. . . . Hullo . . . Reynolds. . . . They want to know when? . . . Oh, the earlier the better! The machine-gun's enfilading one of their trenches. . . . Right away? Splendid! . . . No. There are no troops in the danger area. . . . Yes, I'll observe for you. . . . He's going to turn 'em on now, sir.

COLONEL. Good work. Well, I must get on to C Company. Leave you fellows to enjoy the fun. See you to tea, Barrington.

THE BADGER. Y-yes, sir. M-many thanks, sir.

COLONEL. Good-bye. . . . Come along, orderly.

[*They walk off down the trench.*

BRAITHWAITE. Badger, you'd better send your servant down to get your kit ready. Or why not go down yourself? There's nothing for you to do here.

THE BADGER. Oh, do you think I m-might? Well, I'll j-just see them do in this emma-gee.

BRAITHWAITE. Don't be an ass You hop it to the transport lines. You don't know when you're lucky.

THE BADGER. All right. I'll just see the f-first shot. . . . Are they r-ready, Williams?

WILLIAMS [*at the telephone*]. Hullo! . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . What's that, Barrington?

THE BADGER. Are they ready yet?

WILLIAMS. In a minute.

[*Tut-tut-tut-tut-tut! from the machine-gun and then a thickening of the fire.*

BRAITHWAITE. By gad, Badger, I believe there are two guns!

BARRINGTON. Sounds damn like it. I th-thought that before.

[*Another burst of fire.*

BRAITHWAITE [*peering cautiously over the parapet*]. Can't see the flash, though, can you?

BARRINGTON [*beside him*]. No, I can't. . . . That's odd! [*Another burst.*] Yes, I can. It's firing from the angle of the l-low wall at the back.

BRAITHWAITE. Where?

BARRINGTON. Look! Wait for the burst. You'll see. T-t-two fingers right of the main entrance. [*Tut-tut-tut-tut-tut!*] There! Do you see the f-flash? [*Craning over the parapet in his eagerness*] L-look! Williams! There's a——

[*Whiplash crack of a rifle bullet. A slow, sprawling fall. The* BADGER *is lying at the bottom of the trench with a trickle of blood oozing from his forehead.*

BRAITHWAITE [*shouting*]. Stretcher-bearer . . . [*Groaning*] Oh, my God, Badger—why did you? Turn him over . . . field-dressing. . . . In the head! . . . It's that bloody sniper. . . .

[*The telephone—buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz!*

WILLIAMS. Hello—yes? . . . Ye-es!

STRETCHER-BEARER. . . . No good, sir! It's through the brain. He's done in.

BRAITHWAITE [*covering the body with a trenchcoat*]. Poor old Badger and his twins. . . . Oh, damn this filthy war!

WILLIAMS. Bad luck, Braithwaite. . . . Well—we will send up a few of the other side to keep him company. We're just going to begin shooting! . . . Hullo? Are you there? Ready. . . . Yes. We're looking out. [*Far-away boom—a noise like a runaway train—CRRANG! and the thud of falling débris.*] Splendid. Minutes two 'oh' more right. Drop five 'oh.' Repeat.

BRAITHWAITE. . . . Sergeant Andrews! Get your Lewis gun on those fellows running out of the Château. Quick, man, quick!

[*Tut-tut-tut-tut-tut-tutter-tutter-tutter-tut! Another far-away report and a heavy explosion on the Château wall.*

WILLIAMS. Direct hit, by Jove! Who says the heavies can't shoot? [*Into the telephone*] Hullo—Reynolds—by gad, old man, you got a direct hit. Plumb in the bull. . . . And listen, the machine-gun's crew ran out of the Château and the infantry've bagged the lot with a Lewis gun. . . . Yes, I'll report on each shell. [*Again the far-away report and the noise of the shell overhead. Stunning detonation on the doomed building.*] Marvellous! The whole west wall's caved in! Go on. There won't be a stone standing to-night. Are the nine-two's going to shoot as well? . . . Yes, I'll observe for them too. Carry on. . . .

[*Boom! . . . Boom! . . .*

## FOURTH SCENE

*Music*

THE CHRONICLER

God gave the day for labour and delight,
For love and slumber God gave night.
Kisses, sleep, laughter; song, sun, and flowers,
Are not these enough to fill twenty-four hours?

Must there be also poison-gas and shell
And mud . . . and blood . . . and death . . . and devastation—
The night a nightmare from the deeps of hell,
The day a worse damnation?

*The scene is the assembly for a dawn attack. A company of infantry cautiously forming up. The night is pitch-black. The sound of cautious footsteps advancing along a muddy track. An occasional Verey light fitfully lights up the night and shows the whereabouts of the enemy.*

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. Sergeant-Major.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Sir?

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. I suppose this *is* the White Château?

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Suppose so, sir.

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. Ask that fool of a guide.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Guide's just told me 'e's missed 'is way, sir.

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. I thought so! Never knew a guide yet that didn't! . . . So like the ruddy Staff to send a battalion over the top without a chance of reconnoitring the ground. *I* don't know where the hell we are. . . . [*The whistle and burst of a shell.*

SERGEANT-MAJOR. That *is* just about where we are, sir, ain't it? [*Whizz-bang!*

THE COMPANY COMMANDER [*irritably*]. Never mind the shells. Just have a squint at this map. . . . Come under here where I can use my torch.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Yes, sir.

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. Our assembly trench is supposed to be between the Château and the stables—do you suppose that mound of mud we passed over there is the stables?

SERGEANT-MAJOR. If this 'ere 'eap of stones above us 'ere is the Chattoh, I reckon it would be, sir.

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. Then where the devil is the trench? [*Whoooo! . . . Bong! some distance off.*] I hope that won't catch the company! We'd better look for the thing, I suppose. . . . Call that guide here.

GUIDE. . . . Sir?

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. Look here, where is this infernal trench? You're supposed to have reconnoitred the way.

GUIDE. Is this the White Chatoo, sir?

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. Hang it, you ought to tell *me* that.

GUIDE. I know the way all right, sir, when I get to the White Chatoo.

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. Well, you'd better assume this is the White Château. Where we are now, I mean. You go on with my orderly and find the trench. Sergeant-Major, you stay with me. [*The* GUIDE *and the* ORDERLY *climb cautiously up the bank and disappear in the darkness.*] Lucky we came on in advance of the company.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. It is indeed, sir.

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. They ought to be up soon—that is if they can manage to walk with all that damned Christmas-tree of equipment they're carrying. Picks and shovels, phosphorus bombs, Mill bombs, rations, extra S.A.A.—Anybody'd think that a battalion nowadays consisted of professional weight-lifters!

SERGEANT-MAJOR. I've arranged the rum issue with the Quartermaster-Sar'nt, sir. They'll get it at the top of Willow Alley in the old front line.

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. That's right. And you've arranged about sending hot-food containers over to the objective?

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Yes, sir. Each platoon will send back 'ere for them.

THE COMPANY COMMANDER. Good. Then everything's cut and dried. . . . Er . . . there's just one thing, Sergeant-Major. If I should happen to stop one——

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Beg pardon, Captain Luttrell, sir, mustn't talk about stoppin' one, sir.

LUTTRELL. . . . Just in case—I want you to keep an eye on that young brother of mine.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. 'E'll be in command, sir, if anything was to 'appen to you.

LUTTRELL. That's what I mean. See he makes a good show of it.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Very good, sir. 'E'll do that without any 'elp from me, sir.

LUTTRELL. Yes, I think he would. He's a good youngster—though perhaps I oughtn't to say so.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Very popular with 'is platoon, sir. Men'd go anywhere with 'im.

LUTTRELL. Then that's all right.

[*Noise of tools and equipment chinking and footsteps on mud.*

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Beg pardon, sir. 'Ere's the company coming up.

LUTTRELL. Now, where the deuce is that guide?

GUIDE. 'Ere I am, sir. I found it all right. Quite close, sir.

LUTTRELL. That's better. Right, Sergeant-Major. Lead in by platoons—Number Seven on the right. I'll come along and inspect as soon as they're all up.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Very good, sir.

[*He moves away in the darkness. His voice is heard a moment later rebuking some unfortunate. "Not so much row with them picks and shovels."*

PRIVATE COSSINGTON [*to his neighbour*]. And what about 'is bloomin' voice for row?

SERGEANT-MAJOR. What's that? Take that man's name, sergeant.

PRIVATE COSSINGTON. 'E's put me on a crime. [*Hopefully*] I'll 'ave ter go back to the transport lines . . .

[*The company continues to file past.*

THE SERGEANT. Ho no you won't, me lad! We can deal with what's left of you after the show. Private 2427, Cossington A., ain't it?

PRIVATE COSSINGTON. I never did 'ave no luck—— Yes, sergeant.

[*He moves on.*

HIS NEIGHBOUR. They're all the same. I got M. and D. on sick parade this morning.

PRIVATE COSSINGTON [*as the darkness engulfs them*]. That's better than Number Nine.

LUTTRELL. Sergeant Harvey. Tell the Sergeant-Major with my compliments that I'd be grateful if he'd wash out that charge. Don't want the men to have anything on their minds but the job to-day. Has Mr Luttrell come up yet?

SERGEANT HARVEY. Just behind, sir. . . . Pass the word down for Mr Luttrell—the Captain wants 'im.

PHILIP. . . . All right. Here I am. . . . Company all up, sir!

LUTTRELL. All right, Phil. I've told the Sergeant-Major to see them into position; and we'll go along and inspect them when he reports O.K.

[*The first faint glimmer of dawn begins to show.*

PHILIP. Oh, right-o! Lord, I'm thirsty! [*He drinks.*] Have a drink?

LUTTRELL. Thanks, old boy. What is it?

PHILIP. Whisky and water, half and half. That's the stuff to give the troops. . . . There was a rum ration for the men. We gave it to them at the last halt.

LUTTRELL. Just come up here on this mound, Phil, I want to show you the objective. [*His head and shoulders appear over the parapet.*]

Steady, don't move. It's getting light, and if we're seen it would give the whole show away. . . . Sergeant Harvey, pass it along that the men are to keep down. And listen—when they get the order to fix bayonets they *must not* let the tips show above the ground.

[*The faint growing light reveals the desolate Flanders battlefield.*

Sergeant Harvey. Very good, sir.

Luttrell. Go yourself, and tell every man in the company *personally*!

Sergeant Harvey. Yes, sir. [*Goes.*

Luttrell. Now, Phil, look here. Do you see that spinney? That's Chasseurs Wood, where the right battalion boundary is. We must send a Lewis-gun section in there as soon as we get to the first objective, so as to find touch with the Fifth Scottish.

Philip. Yes.

Luttrell. You see, there's the enemy line. . . . Look! There's a patrol just going in.

Philip. Let's turn a Lewis gun on them.

Luttrell. No. Only draw fire. They'll get it good and proper in the next half-hour. . . . When you get the company into that first line for heaven's sake look out for the strong point there on the left. *That* one—do you see it—the Mound——

Philip. . . . When I get the company. . . . Tom, aren't you coming over?

Luttrell. Of course I am, old boy. But just in case——

Philip. Don't talk rot, old boy. And don't go through this wretched attack scheme all over again. I've been through it till I know every word in the order by heart, and I'm sick of the very name of the place. [*Looking round him with a grim laugh*] This is a proper *château*, isn't it? Hardly one stone left standing. . . . Do you remember just before the War, when we were going to stay with Alec at the Embassy, somebody suggested we should go to a White Château on the way? I wonder if this was the place.

Luttrell. I've wondered that too.

Philip. It belonged to that fellow Van somebody. Violet Cording's friend.

Luttrell. He came up to Oxford just before I went down. Wonder what's become of him.

Philip. Probably fighting with our "brave Allies." There was a sister, wasn't there?

Luttrell. Was there?

Philip. She was supposed to be pretty. I rather wanted to meet her.

Luttrell. You've arrived a bit late for that, I'm afraid . . . unless she's hiding in the cellars.

Philip. What a damned awful wreck it is!

LUTTRELL. . . . Sunrise. . . It's going to be a gorgeous day—for those that see it!

PHILIP [*hurriedly*]. I love sunrise, don't you? . . . Do you remember when you were on leave before I came out, that early morning ride to Melbury, cubbing? We started by candlelight and saw the sun rise on the way.

LUTTRELL. *You* saw some stars too! You fell off your horse, my son.

PHILIP. I didn't! He fell with me. Pecked in a rabbit-hole. Anybody might have come off.

[*The* SERGEANT-MAJOR *passes them. He is hurrying forward up the road.*

LUTTRELL. What's the hold up, Sergeant-Major?

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Just going to find out, sir. [*He passes on.*

PHILIP. Did you get any letters from home last night?

LUTTRELL. Had a line from the Governor; and I heard from Sheila. . . . Look here, young feller, if anything does happen to me——

PHILIP. I say, have you been seeing a palmist or reading morbid novels, or what?

LUTTRELL. Shut up and listen. If anything should happen, there's a letter for Sheila in my writing-case—in my valise. Phil, I want you to send it to her with a letter of your own. Don't merely post it. Write explaining what's happened and enclose it, otherwise she'd get such a ghastly shock—— And when you see the Governor tell him I want you to have everything he was leaving to me. . . . I've made a will in your favour.

PHILIP. But, old boy, why on earth should it be you? It might just as well be me.

LUTTRELL. I don't know. I've got a sort of—— It's a rum thing, Phil—a sort of knack of knowing things beforehand.

PHILIP. Oh, rot!

LUTTRELL. I have really. I knew perfectly well something would prevent us from going to stay with Alec that time two years ago. . . . And I know quite well that——

PHILIP. Nobody knows these things. It's all nonsense. You've been out here too long, old boy, that's what it is!

LUTTRELL. You don't suppose I'm afraid, do you?

PHILIP. Well—I should be.

LUTTRELL. No, you wouldn't. You'd just be—prepared.

PHILIP. Old man, you're making me feel absolutely eerie. . . . I say—let me take the company over and you go sick. I swear you don't look a bit well——

LUTTRELL. Shut up, Phil, and don't talk like an ass. Shut up, I tell you—— Here's the Sergeant-Major!

Sergeant-Major. There isn't room for all the company in that there trench, sir. It comes to a dead end. They extend right down this 'ere road as well.

Luttrell. My God, isn't that typical! The map shows it as a continuous line for over a mile. [*Looking over the top of the road*] If we try to make ground over the top we'll give the whole show away. . . . They'll say to-night—everything went according to plan. But we've got to kick off with half the company at right angles to the objective! . . . Look here, Phil, when we start you'd better go over at this end and wheel the men into line with the barrage. Otherwise they'll get hell. Who's our best corporal, Sergeant-Major?

Sergeant-Major. Corporal Milligan, sir.

Luttrell. Yes, I think so. Well, put him at the extreme left of the company and tell him to set the pace. They'll have to double for a start. Go and warn him yourself. [Sergeant-Major *hurries out.*] Phil, give the order to fix bayonets, and you'd better explain to these fellows and tell them to keep up with the barrage. See they've got their two hundred rounds, three bombs, and rations; and pick or shovel every third man. . . . And respirators in the alert position. I'll do the left half company. [*Muttering as he goes*] God, I'd like to put the fool who worked out this attack in charge of it! The whole bloody war's a bungle. . . . [*His voice is lost in the darkness.*

Sergeant Harvey. Captain seems a bit queer this morning, sir. Not ill, I hope.

Philip. I don't think he looks in the least queer. . . . Pass down the order to fix bayonets.

Sergeant Harvey. Yes, sir.

Philip [*to himself*]. . . . All the same, I wonder. He does look a bit mouldy. . . . [*Addressing himself to the task of last minute preparations for the attack*] Bear to the right when we start, and keep up with the barrage.

Man. Yes, sir.

Philip [*to the next man*]. Bear to the right when we start, and keep up with the barrage. . . . Got your iron ration?

Man. Yes, sir.

Sergeant Harvey [*returning*]. There's a man over there without a respirator, sir. Says 'e slipped in a shell-'ole coming up and lost it struggling out. . . . They was pretty bad, them shell-'oles, sir.

Philip. Here, give him mine. I've got a spare one. [*Passing along the line of men*] Bear to the right when we start and keep up with the barrage. . . . Sergeant Harvey.

Sergeant Harvey. Yes, sir?

Philip. Go up to where the road joins the trench and work down towards me.

SERGEANT HARVEY. Very good, sir. [*He goes.*

PHILIP [*to the next man*]. Bear to the right when we start and keep up with the barrage.

MAN. Very good, sir.

[*Whoo-bang, whoo-bang, whoo-bang!—a salvo of shells.*

PHILIP. Lord, I hope those weren't in the trench! [*Whooo-bang, whoo-bang, whooo-bang!—another salvo.*] That's pretty close. [*WHOOO-BONG!—near by.*] . . . Anybody hurt?

SERGEANT HARVEY [*from a little distance*]. No, sir, it fell clear.

PHILIP. Thank the Lord! . . . Here, that man, keep that confounded rifle of yours down. If you show a bayonet over the top we'll get strafed to blazes! . . . [*Carrying on with the instructions*] Bear to the right when we start, and keep up with the barrage.

VOICE. Yes, sir.

PHILIP. Got your three bombs?

VOICE. Yes, sir.

PHILIP [*to the next*]. Bear to the right when we start, and keep up with the barrage. . . . That two hundred rounds you got?

VOICE. No, sir. Lewis gunner, sir.

PHILIP. Right. . . . Here, this fellow's all wrong, surely. Look here—you can't——

[*WHOOOOOO-BONG! down the trench and immediately after CRR-ANG! in the trench behind them. Groans.*

SERGEANT HARVEY [*hurrying up*]. You hit, sir? You hit?

PHILIP. No, I'm all right. Help me up. . . . This poor devil is, though. . . . Good Lord——! [*Groans from the wounded man.*

SERGEANT HARVEY. Gently, sir. 'E's broken near in 'arf. . . . All right, chum. Easy does it.

PHILIP. Who is it?

SERGEANT HARVEY. Private Cossington, ain't it, me lad?

PRIVATE COSSINGTON. That's me, sar'nt. Yer won't 'ave me on that crime now, will yer? . . . 'Oo . . . 'ell! [*A gasp of pain and the end.*

SERGEANT HARVEY. 'E's gone, poor devil! 'Ere, put a ground-sheet over 'im, some one. Corporal Evans, you see to it. . . . We'd better get on with it, sir. Time's running close!

PHILIP. Yes, Sergeant Harvey. . . . What's that? [*A noise of some one hurrying down the trench, demanding as he comes "Is Mr Luttrell down 'ere? Is Mr Luttrell down 'ere?"*] It's the Sergeant-Major. What is it, Sergeant-Major? My brother . . .

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Mr Luttrell, sir. The Captain's killed, sir, and you're in command of the company. . . . Bear up, sir, we go over in a few minutes.

PHILIP. I'm—quite—all right, Sergeant-Major. How did it—— Is he——

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Them shells, sir. . . . Better not look at 'im, sir! E 'ad no pain, sir, I swear to God.

PHILIP. No. . . . I'm quite all right. Quite. . . . Did you tell Corporal Milligan what to do?

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Yes, sir.

PHILIP Sergeant Harvey, carry on telling the men about changing direction. Look alive. Don't bother to report to me. There isn't time. Go straight to your platoon. . . . Sergeant-Major, did you finish warning the left half company?

SERGEANT-MAJOR. No, sir. Only Number Six platoon.

PHILIP. Send Sergeant Daniels to do it.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Yes, sir. Sergeant Daniels—carry on with warning Number Five platoon to bear right and keep up with the barrage.

VOICE. Very good, 'Major.

PHILIP. Now, Sergeant-Major. You'd better go over in command of the rear waves of the attack.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Beg pardon, sir, that's where the Company Commander ought to go.

PHILIP. I'm going with the first wave. Kindly don't argue. . . . Now . . . you know our job on the first objective—and you know where the strong points are to be made?

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Yes, sir, of course.

PHILIP. Have we got that ground-sheet for signalling to the aeroplanes?

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Yes, sir. Letter K, sir.

PHILIP. The order says to light flares. But don't for heaven's sake. They only draw fire.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. No, sir. . . . Only two minutes to go now, sir.

PHILIP. I know that . . . Platoon sergeants to get their men up ready to go over directly the barrage starts. . . . Pass it down.

VOICES. Right, sir.

[*The sound of the message being passed from mouth to mouth.*

PHILIP. Keep those bayonets down. . . . Pass that along too. Well, Sergeant-Major. I'll look for you on the first objective. See the rear waves keep well up with the attack. I expect we'll need 'em. . . . Half a minute to go.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. That's right, sir. The company'll do you credit, sir.

PHILIP. Good Lord, I know that. Only hope I'll do the same. [*To his neighbours*] Get ready, men.

SERGEANT-MAJOR. Ten seconds, sir.

[*A pause of that time, and then an inferno of sound. The stunning detonation of the counter-barrage and the clatter of machine-gun fire.*

## FIFTH SCENE

*Music*

THE CHRONICLER

You know about the Grand Attack,
And how we drove the enemy back,
And how they threw their arms away
And fled—and fought another day:
And how they rallied and how we fled,
Throwing our arms away instead;
And turned at bay and fought amain
And put them on the run again,
And kept them running till the end.

You know the cost—a bagatelle—
A mere ten million souls or so;
The land a holocaust of shell
On which no blade of grass did grow—
With every trace of man's abode
Smashed like a harrow-stricken toad.

*The scene is a hospital Nissen hut equipped for two patients. Present: an* AMERICAN DOCTOR, *a* BRITISH ARMY NURSING SISTER, *a* NURSE *in foreign uniform. Two patients, one in a bed near the window—the other behind a screen. The* AMERICAN DOCTOR *is saying:*

DOCTOR. . . . .and I hope that will be quite satisfactory, Sister.

SISTER. Yes, Doctor. That will be all right.

DOCTOR. I don't know what we're to do if the casualties continue so high. The base hospitals are so choked that I can't evacuate any faster, and we're filled here beyond our capacity.

SISTER. We could run up some huts and tents to take off the less serious cases.

DOCTOR. Yes. But the staff? I'm short-handed for what we have to do already. . . . Well, we must manage the best we can. Do you realize, Sister, that in the battle of last week alone there were fifty thousand casualties on this front only, to say nothing of quantities of wounded prisoners. There's to be another attack to-morrow on an even greater front. And the Director of Medical Services warns me to expect what he calls "a rapid succession of hammer-blows." Gee, I do wish they'd get away from flowery language!

SISTER. And get down to the job!

DOCTOR. Sure. Sure. That's understood . . . But you get what it all figures out to! By to-morrow night there'll be anything up to seventy-five thousand casualties to deal with. And then next week. . . . Well, it's no good meeting trouble half-way. I'd better go round your wards, Sister.

SISTER. Yes. . . . Shall we begin with Major Luttrell?

[*They go the bed by the window.*

DOCTOR. Sure. . . . He's nearly fit to travel down to the base. . . . [*To the patient as they reach the bed*] Well, Major, how are things?

PHILIP. I'm all right.

DOCTOR. No, sir. You are not all right. But you soon will be. Just let me see the chart, Nurse. Thank you. . . . Yes, you're doing fine. Well—Nurse looking after you all right?

PHILIP. Much too kind.

DOCTOR. I don't mind telling you you're in luck's way. You've got the finest nurse on the Western Front. We wouldn't lose her for anything you could name. Would we, Sister?

SISTER. No, indeed.

DOCTOR. She tried to give us the slip when we moved here; but we weren't taking any. And you're sharing her with General Simcocks.

PHILIP. The old boy behind the screen?

DOCTOR. That's it.

PHILIP. Poor Nurse! . . . I say, Doctor, could I be moved over to the window. I'd like to be able to look out.

DOCTOR. Sure. Nurse will wheel you over.

NURSE [*there is something familiar about her*]. Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Just do it right away now, Nurse. Sister and I will manage the General. [*He proceeds with* SISTER *to the* GENERAL'S *bed, and peeps round the screen.*] He's asleep. . . . Looks like a great big he-walrus! Carry on, please, Sister.

[*They go together.*

PHILIP. Thanks so much. Can you raise me a bit?

NURSE. Yes, certainly. [*She winds up the bed with a clanking handle.*] Can you see now?

PHILIP. Splendidly. . . . [*A little pause.*] Nurse, tell me something. Where is this place? All the time I've been here I've had a sort of subconscious sense of familiarity. And now—I seem to know the shape of the country—that scarred gaunt bit of woodland over there; and that heap of broken masonry. There's something about it all that haunts me. . . . Where am I?

NURSE. It is what remains of the White Château.

PHILIP. The White Château! . . . I thought I knew the place. This is where my brother was killed two years ago. . . . Isn't it ghastly, Nurse?

NURSE. Yes, it is ghastly . . . and it is all that survives of my home. . . .

PHILIP. Your home! My dear girl!

NURSE. The White Château is my father's house—Charles Van Eysen. I am Diane Van Eysen.

PHILIP. Oh, my dear child, I'm so sorry! I wouldn't have said a word if I'd known . . . I didn't mean that the place was ghastly. Only what has happened here.

DIANE. It is worse than ghastly. . . . They shot my brother here on the day the War began.

PHILIP. God, how dreadful!

DIANE. Horrible. . . . When the clearing-station moved forward to this spot I nearly asked to be exchanged to another—and then I thought there must be some . . . purpose behind it all—and I stayed.

PHILIP [*half to himself*]. Van Eysen? One might almost say it was predestination!

DIANE. You mean my returning here?

PHILIP. No. The whole thing. . . . Do you happen to remember just before the War two Englishmen were coming over to stay with your brother?

DIANE. Yes.

PHILIP. My brother was one . . . I was the other. My brother was killed here in the attack. And now, after two years I come back here and meet you.

DIANE. . . . Almost uncanny!

PHILIP. We were evidently intended to meet—Miss Van Eysen.

DIANE. That sounds absurd.

PHILIP. That we were intended to meet?

DIANE. No. Miss Van Eysen!

PHILIP. It is absurd. I'll call you Diane—may I? I feel I'm entitled to after all that's happened. My name's Philip. . . . May I, Diane?

DIANE. Yes, Philip. We will have a compact of friendship.

PHILIP. I should like that.

[*He takes her hand, and holds it a shade longer than is necessary. She colours and glances at the clock.*

DIANE. Time for your medicine. [*She gives him a draught.*

PHILIP [*lying back*]. Diane . . . will this war go on for ever? It's spoiling the world and every one in it. . . . Or do you want revenge for your brother?

DIANE. No. . . . I did. For a year I prayed—oh, terrible things! I had seen my mother die of grief and my father go out of his mind. But when I became a part of the war-machine myself, as a nurse—I found I couldn't hate any more.

PHILIP. I worked it off too. The day my brother was killed I hated the enemy as I didn't know it was possible to hate anything. But——

DIANE [*turning*]. . . . But the old men behind the line on both sides. They hate; and they'll make others hate in the future!

PHILIP. Civilians. Yes. They don't know what war means. Don't realize that it's a huge machine and that the people who happen to kill are just as much puppets as the people that happen to be killed.

DIANE. Machine . . .

PHILIP. Relentless.

DIANE. Worse than that—malignant, cruel, devilish.

PHILIP. No. Only impersonal.

DIANE. You don't feel sometimes that it's satanic? Literally! Created and wielded by some monstrous personal devil to undo all the progress of men away from savagery?

PHILIP. I'm not sure. It brings out a lot of good in individuals.

DIANE. Wouldn't they have been rather decent in any case? Think of these four years of hate and lying! Whole nations concentrating on hatred of each other—feeding their hate on lies, and knowing in their hearts that they were lies.

PHILIP. Not the people in the line.

DIANE. It seems to me that those are the ones that have been allowed to count least.

PHILIP. They'll count in the future.

DIANE. I wonder. Or will they be swept aside by those who stayed behind . . . and then pushed out of the way by a new generation?

PHILIP. You think rather oddly for a girl, don't you?

DIANE. I've had four years alone to learn to think in, Philip. And I've seen so many odd things happen.

PHILIP. What are you going to do when it's all over?

DIANE. I am going to build up my poor Château again.

PHILIP. Here? On this spot?

DIANE. On this spot. Yes.

PHILIP. How brave!

DIANE. Oh, no. . . . It was a promise to my father. I shall try to keep it. . . . And you, Philip, what will you do?

PHILIP. I should rather like to help. . . . It would be a sort of . . . memorial to my poor old brother.

DIANE. Not for yourself?

PHILIP. That was horribly ungrateful of me. I might have had the decency to remember that I owe my life to you.

DIANE. Not to me. To the hospital.

PHILIP. . . . Diane, after what we have gone through to meet each other it would be absurd to pretend. . . . You don't want me to pretend?

DIANE. No.

PHILIP. Because I won't pretend. Only one thing kept me alive, and you know it.

DIANE. . . . No, Philip.

PHILIP. You know it. . . . Diane, God knows when this war will end, and God knows if we shall either of us come through it alive. . . . Will you marry me before I go up the line again?

DIANE. . . . If I said yes, it would mean nothing.

PHILIP. Why? What's this?

DIANE. You'll never go up the line again.

PHILIP. . . . I'm given up . . . is that it?

DIANE. Not so bad as that. . . . You'll never walk properly again, but——

PHILIP [*stunned*]. A cripple!

DIANE. . . . You ought to be glad to be alive.

PHILIP. . . . Yes. [*Rallying*] Yes, by George, I ought! Only . . . of course, I couldn't ask you to marry a cripple.

DIANE. I didn't say you'd never speak again, Philip. You could try, you know.

PHILIP. Do you mean . . . it wouldn't make any difference—I mean would you—will you?

DIANE [*kneels*]. Philip, I'll tell you something. . . . When I saw you brought in here—I knew . . .

PHILIP. Yes? You knew what?

DIANE [*into his shoulder*]. . . . I knew why I was sent back here by the good God.

PHILIP. . . . We've been cheated out of each other for four years.

DIANE. Perhaps you wouldn't have liked me four years ago.

PHILIP. I should have loved you then—and I shall love you all the rest of your darling life. [*They kiss.*

[*Tinkle of bell behind the other screen.*

DIANE [*starting up*]. Philip, I must go. That's my other patient.

PHILIP. Not till you've given me another kiss.

[*She obeys. Furious tinkle of the bell. She starts up in dismay.*

THE GENERAL [*from behind his screen*]. Damn these V.A.D.'s! . . . Here, Nurse. NURSE!

DIANE. Oh, Philip. He's furious. . . . You must let me go.

[*She hurries to the other screen.*

THE GENERAL. . . . Ought to put 'em all under military discipline. Oh, where are you?

DIANE [*she twitches the screen aside*]. Here I am, General. What is it?

THE GENERAL. Did you hear my bell by any chance?

DIANE. Yes. And I expect the other patients heard it too.

THE GENERAL. . . . Well, of all the blasted impertinence! [*She*

*wilts before the storm.*] . . . I'm sorry to use strong language, but really, you know . . .

DIANE [*swiftly*]. As you've apologized we'll forget about that. . . . But you must wait your turn, General! There's nothing the matter with you but a broken arm; and that poor young officer——

THE GENERAL. He's got a broken heart, I suppose.

DIANE. Nothing of the kind.

THE GENERAL. No, I thought not.

DIANE. I don't know what you mean. He's been in a terrible fever . . . and . . . and his temperature has to be taken every three hours——

THE GENERAL. My dear girl, I'm now fifty-three years of age, and I dare say very dull. But if you think I don't know the difference between a kiss and a thermometer—— [DIANE *is completely staggered.*] Yes—and then, by George, you turn round on me!

DIANE. General, General, please!

THE GENERAL. And then you try to get out of it by saying please.

PHILIP [*calling from his bed, very weakly*]. It's my fault, sir.

THE GENERAL. Of course it's your fault, sir. Do you think I'm a fool? [*An awkward pause.*

DIANE [*taking the plunge*]. Well, I think you're probably human, and I'll tell you the truth. We're engaged—just this moment.

THE GENERAL. Oh, well, that's another matter. Here, just give me some of that barley-water, and tighten this bandage—and then you can go back and start taking his temperature again.

DIANE. S'sh—be merciful—here's the Doctor coming!

[*The* DOCTOR *re-enters, followed by* SISTER. *There is a piece of paper in his hand. He has an air of suppressed emotion.*

DOCTOR. Well, Nurse. Patients quite happy?

DIANE. I hope so, Doctor.

THE GENERAL [*heartily*]. We're all full of life.

DOCTOR. That's a fine phrase, General, and it just fits the situation. We are all full of life. [*Holding up his paper*] The Army of the South has broken right through—and the enemy's asked for an armistice. . . .

[*A burst of cheering outside confirms this statement.*

DIANE. Philip . . . Philip . . . Philip!

## SIXTH SCENE

THE CHRONICLER

The air, the sunshine, and the trees:
The song that whispers in the breeze
Love's mystery: the mating choice:
The stars, the thrilling human voice:
Life's infinitely varied span—
These are the heritage of man.

A feast from which he turns away
To snarl and haggle and dispute,
Out-tigering the jungle brute
In schemes to slay and slay and slay. . . .

God in Whose name such things are done,
To Whom each side makes anxious prayer,
How finely is Thy mercy spun—
Who knowest all, and yet canst spare!

*The scene is the exterior of the White Château during the rebuilding.* PHILIP *and* DIANE *escorted by the* WORKS MANAGER *have just ended an inspection tour of so much as has been completed. It is latish on an early winter afternoon. The workmen are just about to knock off for the night. Dusk is already beginning to fall.*

WORKS MANAGER. So you see, *monsieur et madame*, we go on fast—yes?

PHILIP. You're getting on well.

WORKS MANAGER. Oh, yes. Soon to be finish now. No time to waste for us—no? Plenty more place to be building up again.

DIANE. The devastated area.

WORKS MANAGER. Oh, yes. We are doing a lot for that of course. My firm, you know, they are what you say tendering for all these jobs. It is five—ten years' work to make it all nice again.

PHILIP. The War has done some one a good turn, then.

WORKS MANAGER. Oh, well, of course if building are smash you must employ to builders for building up again. It is just common sense, I suppose. . . . Look, I would like to show *monsieur et madame* what we are making of the garages, and then it will be time to go. . . .

[*The ringing of the works bell and the scurrying of many feet proclaim that the day's work is over. A few of the workmen pass by* PHILIP *and* DIANE.

PHILIP. Don't bother to wait to-night. We'll come over and have a look to-morrow.

WORKS MANAGER. Well, if you are so kind to excuse me——

DIANE. Of course——

WORKS MANAGER. Then I go, if you please. Because my wife, I know she waits. Good day, *monsieur et madame.*

[*He goes after the workmen. Left to themselves,* DIANE *and* PHILIP *contemplate the new Château in silence. After a little pause* DIANE *links hands with her husband and speaks.*

DIANE. I'm so glad we had the courage to do it.

PHILIP. Got to forget about the War—and reconstruct.

DIANE. Forget!

PHILIP. Well—remember in the right spirit. It's the same thing.

DIANE. Do you suppose people talked like that after 1870?

PHILIP. No fear! One side wanted revenge; and the other had swelled head.

DIANE. You're quite sure that isn't the case to-day?

PHILIP. God help us! I hope we're not so primitive as that!

DIANE. . . . I suppose people do learn.

PHILIP. Jolly look-out for the infant if they don't!

DIANE. No, Philip, no! When I think of baby . . . and then remember Jacques and your brother . . .

PHILIP. It's a mouldy sort of idea.

DIANE. . . . Surely it can't all happen again.

PHILIP. Well . . . the Peace Settlement is a bit rocky in spots—but I expect it'll last our time out.

DIANE. And then collapse and destroy unborn generations! How horrible! . . . If I believed that, Philip, I'd leave this place in ruins as a warning and remembrance.

PHILIP. People wouldn't take it that way. They'd only think we hadn't money enough to finish the job.

DIANE. People are not nearly so commonplace in their thoughts as Englishmen like to pretend. . . .

PHILIP. How do you kuow? . . . And what do you mean, anyhow?

DIANE. An Englishman is never happy unless he's doing a good turn and excusing it as good business.

PHILIP. Well . . . it *is* good business.

DIANE. Luckily, my dear, it isn't necessary for a wife to understand her husband. It's enough if she loves him.

PHILIP. Quite enough—if she's sure she does.

DIANE. So very sure.

PHILIP [*kisses her*]. Shocking infatuation of a husband and wife. Rather a good place for it, too. Do you realize this must be just about the site of the hospital hut where you nursed me.

DIANE. No, is it? . . . What memories this place will have for us! That . . . and poor little Jacques. . . . Did you ever find the spot where your brother was killed?

PHILIP. It was somewhere between the old Château and the stables. . . . Over this way. There ought to be the remains of a trench somewhere. Yes. Look. It begins just there.

DIANE. That ditch all overgrown with weeds?

PHILIP. Just that. It was turned into the Château defences after the line had been taken forward. . . . There was a brigade headquarters in the cellars somewhere here. That [*pointing*] led up to the front line.

DIANE. It isn't very impressive now.

PHILIP. Impressive! It's trivial. But three years ago it meant everything. Just imagine how we worked to give it permanence—dug tunnels below it; furnished them quite comfortably, and came back to it after venturing out a few yards at night as one might return to a walled city.

DIANE [*moving in silence to the arch*]. And now all are gone except the dead. And they . . .

PHILIP. What is it, dear?

DIANE. Oh . . . it's all so unspeakably desolate in the twilight. Shall we ever have the fortitude to live here? Can trees be made to grow again in this wilderness, and flower-gardens and lawns and shrubberies? [*He is silent.*] Philip, are we trying to do an impossible thing? Look! Look at it in the fading light. Mile on mile of desert! And it used to be all hop-gardens and wheatfields and cosy farms and woods full of bluebells and violets, and little sparkling streams. . . . And away down in the hollow there was a grave medieval town clustered about a great cathedral and an old, old Gothic hall.

PHILIP. If you look back you can only see despair. Turn and look at the new Château. It is going to be a beautiful place. Our children will feel for it just as you feel for the old one. For the rest—it's deserted, but we are only the first of many. In five years the farms and the hop-gardens will be there. In ten the woods will be growing up. In twenty years there'll be a new town with a new cathedral—and perhaps a new spirit infusing it.

DIANE. It will never be the same. . . . Philip, I'm tired!

PHILIP. Stay and rest. I think I'll go on. I want to find the old front line. [*He wanders away.*

DIANE. . . . It will never be the same. . . .

A VOICE. No—it will never be the same.

[*The speaker, dimly visible in the dusk, is 'running over' the walls with a T-square—perhaps he is a stonemason.*

DIANE. I beg your pardon? I thought I was alone.

THE WORKMAN [*running his square over the buttress near by*]. It never has been the same and never will be. . . . There was a time when the finest granite wasn't too good for work of this kind . . . Now brick has to serve—with stucco facing.

DIANE. Stone facing is what I ordered.

THE WORKMAN. Well, stone facing. . . . It's a makeshift.

DIANE. It was all we could afford.

THE WORKMAN. . . . They all say that.

DIANE. You're connected with the work in some way, I suppose?

THE WORKMAN. I am interested in it. . . . [*Resuming his measurements*] Yes . . . it's solid enough, but as you truly say—it will never be the same again.

DIANE. The house?

THE WORKMAN. . . . Or the world, for that matter.

DIANE. . . . Oh—the world . . .

THE WORKMAN [*turning from his occupation*]. You think the world will look after itself? Will it? Stucco is not the monopoly of builders. Statesmen are sometimes fond of using it. It conceals all kinds of ugly and fraudulent things.

DIANE. . . . Not if the owners supervise the work.

THE WORKMAN [*coming forward*]. Rebuilding a house is more than a matter of bricks and mortar. What of the vanished associations—the corridor where the children romped at night, the corner under the big leaded windows, where you used to steal away with your book, the old wooden seat by the elm-tree, where your grandfather always sat at evening? Can you replace those in a building scheme? . . .

DIANE. No one can revive what is dead. You must create afresh.

THE WORKMAN [*with a touch of fierceness*]. And the old world—is that not dead? What about the rebuilding of the world? . . . Oh, yes, you think you will begin again where you left off when the War came; but you will not!

DIANE. Perhaps not exactly—but somewhere near.

THE WORKMAN. How? The old associations are gone. The world is in ruins. There are new ideas—new methods—new peoples even.

DIANE. The better for the rebuilding.

THE WORKMAN. . . . I wonder. What if the material should be at best a makeshift, and at worst an imposture? . . . Not every one is using honest bricks and stone facing. They say they cannot afford it.

DIANE. . . . Don't. You make it seem hardly worth while trying.

THE WORKMAN. Is the lesson of past experience so fruitful of hope

for the future? The War has dethroned many kings—to set up a worse tyrant in their places. Fear. All Europe is afraid. Half Europe is revengeful—and the other half is greedy. . . . Are you wise to rebuild your house on such a volcano?

DIANE. It's the only honest thing to do. I promised my father. . . . Besides, to be afraid of fear is the meanest cowardice of all.

THE WORKMAN. This house of yours embodies the whole history of Europe. Is it one to encourage a prudent builder? It was put here as a rude fortification, just a ditch and a palisade fence and a few huts enclosed, in the long-long-forgotten Bronze Age. The tribe that worked these fields came in here with their cattle at night. . . . All through the centuries, down to the coming of the Romans, this house stood here. The Germanni sacked it. The Gauls sacked it. It became the stronghold of a Frankish chieftain. A great castle grew up—and bands of robbers fought for its possession. The Emperor Charlemagne came here to the christening-feast of the son of his niece; and they built an exquisite stone chapel—long since destroyed. . . . Do you remember that there used to be a tower with a conical roof?

DIANE. Yes, yes—of course!

THE WORKMAN. . . . That was here when the English king, Edward, went past with his great army to meet the French at Cambrai. Then in the wars of Alva, the old Château that had stood since Charlemagne was almost burnt to the ground. That was a war for God, you understand. Catholic and Protestant. They burnt the Châtelaine at the stake and set fire to the poor stones, because they had been the house of a heretic. And then the new Château was destroyed when the great Marlborough fought at Malplaquet. And when again it had been restored it was destroyed afresh in the campaigns of Napoleon. After Napoleon people said, "There can be no more war. It is too wasteful. Too uncivilized." But the White Château heard the guns of the German army in 1870. Now, for all the prophecies of peace, it has been destroyed again; no single stone remains on another; and again you build it up. . . . Are you wise?

DIANE. You seem to be strangely familiar with the history of my Château. I thought you were a workman at first . . . but I suppose you're a student from the University. . . . I can't see you at all in the shadow. How do you know all this?

THE WORKMAN. Because it is my own history.

DIANE. . . . Your history?

THE WORKMAN. . . . The history of mankind . . . The memory that dwells among the stones. . . . You thought it was only bricks and mortar—a few stones piled one above another? Do you suppose when something is made that the good God sees to be beautiful, He does not put a soul in it? That there is no soul in the Abbey of

Beauvais, or Westminster, or of Notre-Dame de Paris? Do you think there is nothing but stones in the poor mutilated Cathedral of Ypres?

DIANE. A spirit? . . . Then why do you put doubts in my mind?

THE WORKMAN. Because of the misgiving in my own. . . . It would be sad to see your home uprooted and your children taken away to fight and perish. Are you well advised to return?

DIANE. Over there in England it seemed clear enough. One learned to forget a little of the horror. But here it seems as though the terrible passions of the War were still hovering in the air. . . . Hasn't the world learned its lesson yet?

THE WORKMAN. Is there any sign that it has? Everywhere despite famine—misery—waste—everywhere people are forgetting why they fought, and even the horror of fighting. . . . They are all ready to begin again. Why did you fight, Diane?

DIANE. . . . We had to. War was forced on us. . . .

THE WORKMAN. Your late enemies say the same; but put that aside. You fought. You have won. What have you settled? In all history there has been no war that did not pave the way for another. Is your war the exception?

DIANE. Ours was a war to end war.

THE WORKMAN. A charming aspiration. What have you done to ensure its fulfilment?

DIANE. . . . We have made a League of Nations!

THE WORKMAN [*formidably*]. Is that a thing of stucco—or is it of stone? If the one, your victory is an achievement; if the other, your destruction will be accomplished through it, and will be the swifter. . . . For make no mistake—the next time is the last time! The civilization of Europe will vanish. You and the White Château will go with it beyond possibility of redemption. . . . There are other places to make a home. The world is wide, Diane. Do you still come back here?

DIANE. If one believes, one must do an act of faith.

THE WORKMAN. . . . Yes.

DIANE. I believe——

THE WORKMAN [*harshly*]. In the League of Nations?

DIANE. . . . In God.

THE WORKMAN. Ah! In God. Yes. . . . But why should He or ever be pulling His naughty children out of the fires that they kindle themselves? . . . The patience of God may be wearing thin, Diane!

DIANE. His Mercy is everlasting.

THE WORKMAN. . . . So is His Judgment!

DIANE. . . . I believe in the God in Man; in love; in the beauty of life; in the conquering struggle with evil; in the destiny of

mankind. I believe there is a purpose in creation; a mighty scheme in the universe. . . . [PHILIP *visible in the archway, returning.*

PHILIP. . . . Diane, Diane . . .

DIANE. Hullo! What? Where's the man I was talking to? [*But he has disappeared.*

PHILIP. There was no one talking to you, darling. You must have been asleep.

DIANE. No, Philip. . . .

PHILIP. Of course you must! I found my old trench; it runs down into that little hollow. . . . Brr! Isn't it cold! Come on, we've a forty-mile drive before dinner. Look out, it's pitch-dark.

DIANE. . . . One sees a glimmer of light from time to time.

# THE LIKES OF HER

## By CHARLES McEVOY

*First produced at the St Martin's Theatre, London, August 15, 1923*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

*(in the order of their appearance)*

Mrs Small
Florrie Small
Mrs Pool
Alfred Cope
Samuel Bilson
The Man in the Coffee-house
Tod Small
Mrs Kemp
Mr Bray
Sally Winch
Jim Sears
The Other Man in the Coffee-house
A Boy
George Miles
Children

Time: *During demobilization after the Great War. Act I commences on a Sunday morning; the subsequent Acts take place on the two following days.*

CHARLES McEVOY wrote nearly a dozen plays, but *David Ballard* (1907) and *The Likes of Her* (1923) are the most outstanding. It is said of the former—the author's first experiment in drama—that it set the fashion in realistic domestic plays, and thus inaugurated an epoch. Miss Horniman selected it for the opening of her historic Repertory Theatre in Manchester. *The Likes of Her* is an attempt to portray East End life, with its mixture of humour and pathos, cruelty, squalor, and tenderness, on the stage. The superficial characterization is excellent; the Cockney dialogue and slum manners are true to life—as true, at any rate, as it is possible to make them in a theatre.

Perhaps the only objection which the higher critics bring forward against the play is the author's method of handling the main theme, which is the return of a maimed soldier to his lover. But this situation, happening in the East End, is not essentially different from the

situation as it would occur in any other class of society: it is a human problem, independent of social caste, and, in the opinion of one critic, impossible of satisfactory treatment in drama.

Charles McEvoy died in February 1929, at the age of forty-nine. His other plays include *When the Devil was Ill* (a light comedy satirizing the simple life), *The Three Barrows*, *The Village Wedding*, and *The Situation at Newbury*.

# ACT I

SCENE: *Bridewell Court, Stepney.*

*A slum courtyard, seen from an audience's point of view. There are seen three sides of a square of houses, of sooty brick, with broken windows and hanging washing. To the left of centre of houses at the back is an archway, leading up an alley, with two old iron posts in the entrance. Looking up the alley, are seen high walls, and an abrupt turn at the end, with a gas-bracket protruding from the wall above. Around the courtyard, counting left to right, are seven doors. They belong to:*

*No.* 1. *Empty and boarded up.*
2. *Mrs Kemp.*
3. *Mrs Pool.*
4. *Alfred Cope.*
5. *Sally Winch.*
6. *Mr Bray.*
7. *Children.*

*There are children about the steps of the houses, and* MRS KEMP, MRS POOL, *and* MR BRAY (*cleaning his boots*) *are at their doors. Children down right are playing cards.* ALFRED COPE *shaving in window over door of No.* 4.

*On the rise of the curtain* MRS SMALL, *an immense slattern, is holding forth. Standing back in the archway is* FLORRIE SMALL, *a slight and pretty girl of fifteen, her face swollen with crying, and just now giving vent to dry sobs, wretchedly. She is barelegged, in a short ragged skirt and tattered blouse.*

MRS SMALL [*to* BRAY]. I'll 'ave 'er narsty eyes art. [*She tucks up her sleeves and addresses those about her.*] I'm going to wait 'ere till she comes art, if I waits all day. I ain't got no 'arf a crowns to lose. I'll teach 'er to break my 'arf a crowns in two. Sent my Florrie there back without even the pieces, and 'er farver waiting for 'is supper. Earns the poor child a cruel 'iding, and me left without even me 'arf a crown, I tell you. Knew it was Saturday night and I'd be 'elpless, but she forgot about Sunday morning. [*To* MRS POOL] If you could see that child's limbs. I'll give 'er Sally Winch. I'm a mother, I am, and it's a pore mother that won't protect 'er own. I'll 'ave the 'air out of 'er 'ead when she does come. I'll 'ave 'er cunning eyes art. [*Her back*

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*to* Mrs Kemp *and addressing* Bray] She won't see one 'arf a crown from another when I done with her—— [Mrs Kemp *laughs, but checks herself in alarm when* Mrs Small *turns slowly towards her, and commences to advance.*] Well, what are you larfing at? You larf, do you? Find it funny?

[Mrs Small *gives her sleeves an extra roll as she moves upon* Mrs Kemp, *who stands as if hypnotized by her danger.*

Mrs Kemp [*terror-stricken*]. I never larfed.

[*A boy laughs—she pulls him up out of the way. With blinding swiftness* Mrs Small *seizes* Mrs Kemp *by the hair, and drags her out into the court. Every one prepares to retreat indoors.* Mrs Small's *arms revolve wildly, and after a bewildering moment* Mrs Kemp *escapes, minus much hair, and, dashing into the refuge of her home, slams the door.* Mrs Small *then stalks back to her original position, her trophies in her hands. Boy at right collects cards. A girl swings round the lamp-post and is cuffed up doorway.*

Mrs Small. I'll give 'em larfing. She'll larf, too, when she comes darn, p'r'aps and p'r'aps not. [*She looks up at the window above* Sally's *door.*] You gotter come darn, Sal Winch. You stop there a month, I'll 'ave you. [*She goes over and kicks the door, returning again to her station.*] Never mind. I'll watch it. [Alfred *disappears from window. She turns to the onlookers again.*] As good 'arf a crown as ever was struck in the Mint. If I'd brort it to the shop she wouldn't 'ave broke it. But a pore child as can't 'elp 'erself, that's very different. Oh, yes, we know. That's 'er sort, that is, but she forgot the child 'as got a mother to protect 'er. [*She raises her voice to a wailing recitation.*] You think my man stood unemployed 'arf the morning to draw that, and then 'ave it broke in two by a dirty, sneaking, thieving——

[*At this moment* Sally Winch, *who has quietly edged a large tub of soapy water towards her window-sill, suddenly tips the vessel, and* Mrs Small *is engulfed in an avalanche of suds. While she is still gasping for breath* Sally *leans out of the window, and calls down to her.*

Sally. Now you're washed, I don't mind meeting you. [*She flourishes a large scrubbing-brush.*] And I'll scrub your mouth out, and then gargle it, before I done with you.

[*She slams the window down, and disappears.*

[*All the neighbours are at their doors, delighted.* Mrs Small *still stands dazed and dripping, gaping about her, and intent upon retreat.*

Mrs Small. Who frew that over me? [*No one answers. She strides to* Florrie *and bangs her down stage.*] Do you 'ear, my child? Who frew that over me?

FLORRIE. Sally Winch, Mother.

MRS SMALL [*seizing* FLORRIE]. Who? You wicked girl, you! Say that to my face!

FLORRIE [*wailing*]. Mother, you know she did.

MRS SMALL 'Ome, my child. March 'ome on that!

[*Boxing* FLORRIE's *ears.*

FLORRIE [*at the post, protesting, as* MRS SMALL *commences to thrust her down the alley*]. Mother! Sally Winch is coming down to fight yer.

MRS SMALL [*breathlessly tearing* FLORRIE *from the post she is clinging to*]. I've all day for Sally Winch, my girl. Lee go of that post. You saucy girl, you.

[*She tears* FLORRIE *away, and hurries her down the alley, thumping and pushing her.*

[*The boys all follow down the alley.*

MR BRAY [*coming excitedly out from his door, to shout down the alley*]. Here's Sally coming, Mrs Small.

MRS SMALL [*well down the alley*]. I'm a mother first, Mr Bray. I learn my children manners if nobody else don't. I'll take no sauce and back answers from no child of mine.

[*She disappears with* FLORRIE *round the bend of the alley.*

[*All the court is now out to watch, blocking the archway and shouting imprecations.*

MR BRAY. You're afraid of Sally, you 'arf-drowned old sow, you!

MRS KEMP. Yow. Pig fice. You're a lidy, ain't you! Yow, ow, ow!

CHILDREN [*booing in chorus*]. Yow!

[*As they turn away,* MRS POOL *addresses* MRS KEMP.

MRS POOL. I wonder you didn't stand up to 'er, Mrs Kemp. If she'd caught 'old of me by the 'air like that——

MRS KEMP. You mind your business, Mrs Pool. It was me own 'air, any'ow, yus. So think that over.

MRS POOL. Frowing me 'air back in me teef like that.

[*They move aside as door 5 opens and* SALLY WINCH *comes out. She is a splendid coster-girl, hatless, in a velvet dress, her sleeves rolled up almost to her shoulders, and a broom in her hand.*

SALLY [*at the door of her house*]. Ain't there a lady waiting to receive me?

MRS KEMP. We seed a mermaid, if that's what you're asking for.

MR BRAY. It's just swam down the alley, wiv its tail between its legs. You know, you didn't ort to make an aquarium of a place like this, Sally.

MRS POOL. I'm surprised at you wasting your washing water.

[BRAY *goes into his house.*

SALLY [*laughing*]. Waste it! Wasn't I up there getting to-morrow's washing done as quick as I could before I'd let meself tip the tub on her? I suppose she'll go back now and take it out of Florrie.

MRS KEMP. She's taking it art of 'er. Florrie was stood there under the arch, all the while. When you turned your 'ose on Mrs Small goes for 'er as if she'd done it. If that child gets one 'iding a day she gets a dozen.

MRS POOL. And no more than she deserves, Mrs Kemp. And that's not the first 'arf a crarn by a long way.

SALLY. I suppose she hadn't said I gave 'er another when I broke that in 'arf.

MRS POOL. If you gave Florrie Small anything, that was for 'er. She'd pinch yer shoe-laces while you was tying 'em up, that girl would.

SALLY. P'r'aps if she didn't get what she could by pinching, she'd never get anything at all. But I did think I'd spared 'er a thrashing over the 'arf-crown. Soon as I'd broke it—and it snapped in your hands like dry putty—I thought to meself, that's 'er father's belt for 'er, so I gave 'er one out of me pocket. And without waiting for the fish she'd come for, she bolts off.

MRS POOL. Of course. That was for 'er, I tell you. Besides, she'd got to 'ave 'er Saturday night 'iding, 'arf a crown or no. Every Saturday night, just after supper, she's got to 'ave one. 'Er farver lies in bed 'arf an 'our longer on Sunday mornings, as the pubs open later, and he tires 'imself bashing Florrie, so as to get a better night. Me 'usband and me lodged in the same room as the Smalls two months, so I ort to know.

SALLY. Yes, I was just thinking. What chance 'as she ever had, Mrs Pool?

MRS POOL. Chance? Every chanst, Sal Winch, the sime as me and you.

MRS KEMP. It's what use we make of our chances, Mrs Pool.

MRS POOL. You're quite right, Mrs Kemp. I used to tell 'er. I said, you've every opportunity. If there was improving conversation, she'd walk out of the room; but if you 'appened to be using langwidge, she'd stand with 'er ears like idrophones. Once her farther brought 'er 'ome from Lime'ouse, nearly twelve o'clock. Going to run off with a Chinaman. He gave 'er Chinaman. [*Re-enter* BRAY.] If 'e'd murdered 'er you couldn't 'ave blamed 'im that night.

SALLY [*hotly*]. Nor blame Florrie, neither, for turning to the yallerest Chink in Chinatown. I haven't had much of a life, but I'd 'ave gone in the river before I'd 'ave stood 'ers. Pinch—of course she pinches. Lies—of course she lies.

MRS POOL. Pinching, and lies, and Chinamen! All right and natural, I suppose.

[MRS KEMP *moves to passage.*

SALLY. Yes, as natural to Stepney as fine clothes is to Piccadilly Circus, or hops is to Kent.

MRS KEMP [*at passage*]. Thank Gawd, I'm poor if honest. That's me.

SALLY. Your face never gave you 'er temptation, so you can't judge, Mrs Kemp.

MRS KEMP [*edging forward*]. My fice? What's wrong with me fice, then?

SALLY. Wrong! It's the right sort of face to go through life respectable with, Mrs Kemp. It's a pity Florrie ain't got one like it.

MRS KEMP [*uncertain as to the compliment*]. Oh!

[*She goes up passage.*

MR BRAY. I don't understand you, Sally. She pinches the 'arf a crown you gives 'er, sends 'er mother 'ere to make a rar, and instead of wanting to swipe 'er one yerself, takes it in yer 'ed to make 'er art some one to be sorry for!

SALLY. If a girl's had all the sense knocked art of 'er, you can't turn round and expect her to 'ave any, can you? You've got no eyes in yer 'ed, any of you. Florrie Small, if she knew it, could get away from Stepney. Yes, if she don't leave it too late. Starved and beaten and kicked and blackguarded in a world she never asked to come to, she could 'ave the larf of it, yet. Let 'er find 'erself, and she won't want no Lime'ouse Chinaman.

MR BRAY. What's Florrie Small got the larf of?

[MRS KEMP *comes down passage.*

SALLY. Everything on Gawd's earth, if it comes to that. There ain't a home so foul that if a girl comes out of it as 'ansome as Florrie, and as young as Florrie, it could spoil 'er chance for the best there is in this life. If you want to know why I gave Florrie half a crarn, find art why folks buy flaars first, and then talk about it.

MRS KEMP. That rotten hussey like a flaar?

SALLY. Very like it, when they comes art in the spring-time, and folks as can't afford flaars 'll buy 'em, just to 'ave in the 'ouse. Gawd, to see us 'ere in this stinking 'ole, doing our best to crush one that's yet got a chance in 'er! Yus, and your good ones, arsking nothing better for Florrie than to break 'er in to be tame and honest in a place like this. . . . But she's a chance yet, Mrs Kemp, so don't worry. Florrie's fifteen.

MRS KEMP. And you 'int I'm fifty!

SALLY. Well, I expect if you don't see the old age pension inside twenty years you never won't.

MRS KEMP. If they reduce the age, yes. As for Florrie, you seems to see 'er in her kerridge, don't you! Well, watch it, that it ain't the Black Maria.

[*Quarter-hour chime is heard. A window opens above the do of No.* 4, *and* ALFRED COPE *looks out. He is a demobilize soldier, a thick-set young man in a dark suit with a blac silk handkerchief twisted round his neck. He wears th badge of a London Artillery regiment, the Mons ribbon, an three wound stripes. He has a large head, surmounted b fair hair worn with a butcher's curl showing beneath th peak of his cap. A voluminous talker, with a mask c incessant, effervescent spirits, he commands the attentio of whatever company he is in. Now he looks out to ca jocularly, though with serious intent, to* SALLY. *A paper boy shouts off.*

ALFRED. 'Ello, Sal! Tiddly-o! Ain't you going to Waterloo thi morning? Do you know it's quarter-past twelve?

SALLY. Quarter-past twelve. [*She looks dazedly at the others*

MR BRAY. I wondered when you was going to say something abar it, Sal. Ain't you going this morning, then?

SALLY [*slowly*]. I never thort. I must 'ave forgot it was Sunday. was trimming me 'at and all, last night.

ALFRED. You ain't too late, Sally. Chip up and get your 'at, an nip off.

SALLY [*very dully*]. I shall 'ave to get me 'at, shan't I?

MRS POOL [*as to a child*]. Well, go and get it, dearie. P'r'aps th trains'll be late this morning. Get your 'at, and then ketch a bus, should.

SALLY. Yes, I'll get me 'at.

[*She turns in the same dazed way to the house and goes in, th others watching her silently until she has gone in.*

MRS POOL. Tch, tch, tch, tch, tch.

MRS KEMP [*almost whispering*] Pore thing. I don't know as it wa best for Alf Cope to remind her, Mr Bray.

[*They look up towards* ALFRED'S *window. It closes at this moment and they look back at each other. The paper-boy is heard shouting again.*

MR BRAY. She'd 'ave thort of it 'erself presently. And then been 'arf crazy the rest of the day.

[*Paper-boy enters, sells paper to* BRAY, *speaks to boy with baby left, and goes off.*

MRS KEMP. I've always been 'oping it might leave 'er some day Pass out of 'er mind, like. She can't go on for ever like it.

MRS POOL. If it's on the mind, you can, Mrs Kemp. I remember when I was a girl, there was a white-'aired old lidy used to go to Kennington Butts every midnight, looking for the Lord Mayor's coachman as had promised to meet 'er on the night of Queen Victoria's first

coronation. If it takes you that way, there you are, and you might go on for ever with it. [ALFRED COPE *comes out from his door.*

ALFRED. Sally ain't come down and gone, 'as she?

MR BRAY [*sitting on step*]. She's fetching her 'at, she says.

[*Paper-boy reappears, goes to* ALFRED, *throws papers indoors, and goes off.*

MRS POOL. Tch, tch, tch, tch, tch!

ALFRED [*chuckling*]. I shouldn't think they 'arf knew 'er at the station, nar. Two years, and 'ardly missed a Sunday. [*Moves to* BRAY.] Gawd blimey, as if any man was worth it. Well, it makes you marvel. [*Slowly to* BRAY] You see it art there. You and me torking, Mr Bray. P'r'aps you're my bruvver—anyway you're my best pal. Along comes a big 'un. Misses me, 'its you. There you are. Talking to me 'arf a minute ago, and there's your 'ed lying over there now, and p'r'aps your feet somewhere else. I lights a fag, and never gives you another thort. What are you to me, then? You're finished. You're no furver blinking use. [*Walking away*] And 'ere's a fine girl, Gawd blimey, all this time fretting abart what's only a man after all! As if there weren't no more men in the world!

MR BRAY. You didn't ort to talk like that, Alf. Me with me 'ed over there. I shall want a pint off you for that. 'Elp me pull meself rarnd again.

ALFRED. I was giving you a illistration. The War's over. Don't worry.

MRS KEMP. You think yourself George Miles is dead, don't you, Alf?

ALFRED. Dead, of course he's dead. But if it pleases Sal to go looking for 'im every Sunday morning, let 'er carry on with it. [*Whistles.*] Funny I should come back on a Sunday, wasn't it? I thort she was there to meet me, ugh! [*He speaks with great relish.*] I 'erd 'er speak to another feller—"Anybody 'ere from the London Marnted Rifles?" she ses. I sees it was Sal. I thort to meself this is orl rite! I'd got me tin 'at on, you know. I puts 'im a bit on one side and shpreds art all me equipment, you know, and I goes up, and I ses "'Ello, Sal!" Blimey, I thort she'd 'ave gone orf! "I thort it was George!" she said. Larf! [*Sits on his doorstep.*] I never larfed so much in me life!

MRS POOL. Nothing to larf at, you know, Alf!

ALFRED. Larf! Well, you'd 'ave larfed yourself if you knew George Miles as well as I—did.

MRS POOL. I knew 'im as well as ever you.

ALFRED. Well, then, you'd larf, wouldn't you, if anybody mistook you for 'im? [*Laughs.*] 'Sides, when you've been art there, it's wonderful what you will larf at. I sees an ammunition dump go up once, and I was frowed about as far as 'ere to Greenwich. And then I only 'urt meself larfing.

Mrs Kemp. It strikes me, young feller, the War ain't done you n good. [*Noise of boys is heard in the passage*

Alfred [*slightly seriously*]. P'r'aps I don't take advantage of m opportunities, Mrs Kemp. I was like that at school. Refining influ ences was always wasted on me.

Boy. Uncle Alf! Uncle Alf!

Alfred. 'Ullo! Blimey! 'Ere! If it ain't Jim Sears come 'ome now

[*Coming up the alley is* Jim Sears, *just arrived from the East He is in khaki, carrying a black kitbag, and followed by children. As he comes under the arch* Alfred *seizes him by the hand. Boys come out of* Bray's *house.*

Alfred. Jim Sears.

Jim. Alf! [*During next speech boys worry round for souvenirs*

Alfred. Last time I saw you, you was blind to the world artside the Union Jack Club at Alexandria. Blimey, Jim, I never thort you'd get all this way. You couldn't 'ave walked across the road, then! 'Ave our crard come 'ome, then?

Jim. Yus. Come from Sarfampton this morning. Got to Waterlo at 'arf-past eleven. 'Ello, Mrs Kemp, Mrs Pool. 'Ello, Bray—little fellow's growed, ain't 'e? [*He is shaking hands all round. Boys go u alley.*] Lor' lummey, when's it going to strike 'arf-past twelve, that's what I want to know.

Alfred. Ard you come?

Jim. From Italy. Or do you mean got a bus 'ere from Waterloo? I come this way rarnd to see Sal. I suppose she knows about George Miles?

Alfred. You don't want to mention George Miles to 'er at all, Jim.

Jim. Don't everybody know abart 'im, then?

Alfred. You don't want to mention 'im to Sal Winch. That's what I told you. Time for that when you and me 'as 'ad a talk about it.

Mr Bray. What abart George Miles?

Alfred [*angrily*]. Never you mind what abart 'im. You 'erd what I said, Jim. You wait till you and me's 'ad a tork. If you don't [*this more whimsically*], glad as I am to see you, I'll knock your 'ed off.

Mrs Pool. Is 'e alive or what?

Alfred. Shut your marf. 'Ere's Sal coming. And Gawd 'elp the man or woman as puts it in 'er 'ed that George Miles is living.

Jim. Blast me, Alf, there's them as 'as seen the blighter——

Alfred [*in a savage underbreath*]. Shut it!

[*The door of No.* 5 *opens, and* Sally *comes down, now in her hat. For a moment she stares at* Jim Sears.

Sally [*at her door*]. Jim Sears. They've let you back nar, then?

Jim. Yus. I've just come, Sally, from Waterloo, this morning.

Sally [*down to* Jim's *side*]. You've come back with the Rifles?

Jim. Yus, Sal.

SALLY [*with sudden immense intensity*]. What of George Miles?

JIM [*taken aback and hesitating*]. George Miles?

ALFRED [*quickly interposing*]. He knows no more than the rest of us, Sal. We've been torking about him. First question I arsked—wasn't it, Jim? He ain't been 'erd of.

SALLY. Was I asking you?

ALFRED. He went over the top, in Palestine, I tell you. Anybody as went over de top that day was finished. 'E can't tell you no more than I can tell you, and that's all abart it.

SALLY. When you've done I'll 'ave a word with Jim, Alf. I'm not aware I'd asked you anything. You've told me all you can—all right, now let Jim speak. [ALFRED *goes back to his step and reads.*] Jim, you went out with George, and so did Alf. What Alf knows, he don't want me to. You went out with George, and you know what Alf knows. They say George is missing, meaning dead. Well, I know he ain't. If 'e was dead, I'd know it here. [*She strikes her chest.*] Missing ain't good enough, Jim. You'll tell me what you know.

JIM [*uncomfortably*]. Well, Alf says—he went over the top.

SALLY. Yes?

JIM [*lamely*]. Well, 'e went over. That's right enough.

ALFRED. He was finished. See?

JIM. That's right, Alf.

SALLY. It's a lie, and you know it. Was he court-martialled and shot? Did you do 'im in yerselves? Is that what you're hiding? Gawd, to see a man afraid to tell a woman the trufe. I never did much fancy you, did I, Jim Sears? You weren't the sort a decent girl could fancy. I've told you that more than once, and as to you telling the trufe, it'd give you 'iccups if you tried to.

JIM. Gawd blimey!

SALLY. You tried your best to do George Miles darn, years ago. A man you wasn't fit to comb the 'air of. I wanted a man, not a moke. See? [*She suddenly becomes intense.*] Stand up nar, and tell me the trufe abart 'im.

JIM [*throwing down his kitbag*]. Well, if you want the trufe, Gawd 'elp me, you shall 'ave it.

ALFRED [*dangerous*]. You shut it!

JIM. Let 'er 'ave it! [*The half-hour strikes.*

ALFRED. No! [JIM *blinks from one to the other.*

JIM. 'Arf-past twelve. Anyone who wants a drink can come and 'ave one. Come on, Bray, Mrs Kemp, Mrs Pool. Anybody you like come and 'ave what you like. And blow George Miles.

[*He goes off, followed by all the court.* ALFRED *goes into house and gets hat.* SALLY *sinks down on the doorstep of No.* 5 *in utter dejection.* ALFRED *comes back.*

ALFRED [*uncomfortably, after a pause*]. That's the worst of Jim. 'E never knows when to keep his marf shut. 'E will *tork*!

SALLY [*rising and turning wearily to her door*]. All right, Alf. I can bide my time now. It's got to come out.

ALFRED. Well, if it's got to come.

SALLY [*with a flash back to fierceness*]. I don't want it from you. It'd only be a fancy tale, if you gave it me. You've done George in between you—that's what you done. When they made 'im corporal, I suppose that was the start of it. As if he wasn't always above you—wiv stripes or wivart 'em! Who else went to a grammar school on his own certificates from round here? Who else could write his own tickets for his stall, like George could? He didn't want no corporal's stripes to make him over you. If they'd made him sergeant—yes, if they'd made him sergeant-major, it wouldn't 'ave been too good for him.

ALFRED [*turning to her and going to her below lamp, inspired*]. Well, now you've 'it it, Sal! Now you've got it! Now you've 'it it on the 'ed, you 'ave!

SALLY. What you mean by that?

ALFRED. George *is* alive and well. He's a sergeant-major, and—and it's shwelled 'is 'ed, and 'e ain't never coming back here no more. We ain't good enough for George now. There you've got it, in a nutshell. Wait for George. Watch for George. Go to Waterloo as often as you like for George, but you won't never see 'im no more. He's got a Sam Brarn belt on nar, and it's shwelled 'is 'ed.

SALLY [*turning away from him*]. You'd better go 'ome and bathe yours with some cold water, Alf. [*She turns back to him.*] George too good for us 'ere—let alone me, for any of us! [*She laughs quite merrily.*] Try again, Alf. Whatever it is you're 'iding, it ain't that. The higher George went, the more he'd be—well, just George. He was always that. [*She is very serious now.*] When he had to wear a collar at the grammar school he took it off as soon as he come 'ome, purpose to be like the rest of us.

ALFRED. That was to save 'is collar, p'r'aps.

SALLY. He didn't want no collar. Wasn't George one of the few to wear pearlies, to the last, here? Who'd got a waistcoat like George on 'Ampstead 'Eath? He knew gentlemen didn't wear 'em, but his farver was a coster, and he was prard to be a coster like him. When George wanted to look the toff he could look it. He had 'is City suit, and how often did he wear it? When he had to—like his collar at the grammar school. He didn't want to be larfed at in the West End, so he'd put it on, if he was doing a deal there. But it came off when he got 'ome. A Sam Brarn belt turn George Miles' 'ed! Try again, Alf.

[*Moves away.*

ALFRED [*rather nonplussed*]. I can't do more than tell you. If you

won't believe what you're told, well, you must get on with it. [*He abruptly loses his patience.*] Blimey, what's the use of a blinking peace with you making yourself and everybody else miserable abart one man!

SALLY [*turning slowly into her house*]. All right, Alf. I done with you.

ALFRED. Look 'ere, Sal. If I was to tell you all I know, you'd be more miserable than ever, straight you would. It's quite right. We 'ave wanted to 'ide something from you. [SALLY *comes back.* ALFRED *is labouring at fresh, obvious inventions.*] It ain't exactly this promotion. It ain't that. You wouldn't know George hardly, if you saw him now. [*He brings it out with the utmost diffidence.*] He's got another girl.

SALLY [*with instant passion*]. George Miles 'as?

ALFRED. There, I told you you wouldn't like it. Better to have left you alone with your Waterloo on Sundays.

SALLY. *Where's he got another girl?*

ALFRED [*sorrowfully*]. Art there. Art East. In Alexandria.

SALLY [*horrified*]. A *black* girl!

ALFRED. Black girl? I don't know how many he's got of them. They don't count. No, a proper white girl she is—a bit brarn, you know, from the climate, but a proper white girl.

SALLY. Who is she?

ALFRED [*getting comfortably into stride*]. Daishy, they calls 'er. [*Goes to extreme right and sits on step.*] Her farver keeps one of these, you know, cafays like, where you sits artside on the pavement, you know, all chairs. Iced drinks, you know; beer and that. Orl rite, I can tell you. You know, you sits art there in the front, and watches the girls go by, and sees all these darkies, you know, and camels, you know. [*His eyes bulge and sparkle.*] You'll see a camel walking up the road like we might have a moke, you know. Drives them in a cart and all, like on their Bank 'olidays like. [*He runs dry and stops.*

[ALFRED *lights cigarette.*

SALLY [*calmly*]. You're a liar, Alf. There ain't no Daisy.

ALFRED [*slightly sullen*]. Well, Daisy's one, anyway.

SALLY. Wachyoumean?

ALFRED. That he's gone regular to pot about de women; that's all it is, Sal. You know it's like that out there. East, you know. Some people say it's the climate, but it ain't the climate. [*Mysteriously*] It's the wiy they dresses. [*He pauses a moment. Rises and goes to her.*] Covers theirselves right up, you know. Not like our women 'ere, you know—showing arf theirselves.

SALLY [*contemptuously*]. West End, you mean. Not here.

ALFRED. Yashmaks, they call it. That's all they allars themselves. Just a little shlit, you know, like that. [*He draws a line with his finger across his eyes.*] See their eyes peeping art at you. Makes you mad, you know.

SALLY. Didn't you say this Daisy was a white girl?

ALFRED. Well, you see, that's after the other's excited you, like. George 'eld art, you know. 'Eld art a long time. Then this Daishy bowls 'im over in de finish. . . . She's a fine girl, you know! Got a head of gold 'air on her like——

SALLY [*beside herself*]. Shut up!

ALFRED [*self-defensive*]. Orl rite.

SALLY. If it *was* true—and it ain't—what you want to say he was missing for?

ALFRED. George's own words. He says, "I'm lost! I'm missing!" You see, I was like his pal like, same as I was 'ere——

SALLY [*bitterly*]. His pal!

ALFRED [*undisturbed*]. 'Is pal, of course. And when this happened like this that's what he said to me. "I'm a missing man," he said. He'd got like that, you see, there, wid these girls, he was getting more like a native like. That's a fact, they do get like that, you know.

SALLY [*sarcastic*]. Goes black, I suppose?

ALFRED. No, goes more brarn like. Gets in their ways and that, you know.

SALLY. And Daisy turning the same?

ALFRED. It ain't that so much. She's like a white girl in the cafay, like.

SALLY [*still sarcastic*]. Don't have no ring in her nose, or nothink?

ALFRED. You never saw a girl with a ring in her nose, did you? You'd be surprised. Just a little one on one side, like this. [*He pinches his left nostril.*] It'd surprise you. It don't look bad at all. There ain't nothing 'anging from it, you know. Not like your earrings.

SALLY [*indignant at the comparison*]. Earrings is different, ain't they?

ALFRED. Yes. They'd get in the way of the marth. . . . Then these yer things on the ankles, you know. Like a bracelet like, you know, only on de feet.

SALLY [*bitterly*]. Anything else?

ALFRED. That's abart all what's really different. They paint theirselves, you know, the same as the ladies 'ere—only it's blue. [*Laughs three times.*] I remember one place—supposed to be the coast of Africa I think it was—when we was going art in de ships. I got ashore because I was de officer's servant, to carry some stuff back from the canteen, you know, and George comes with me. We gets off de boat, you know, past all dese black soldiers, with great long guns, you know, like fishing-rods, and we passes up some streets, and just on a corner we sees a girl there, Lor' lummey—— [*Goes to steps and sits.*

SALLY [*frantic, following him—at the lamp-post*]. Shut up abart your girls, can't you? I don't want to know abart them; whether they're black, or blue, or what they are. If a white girl in your own country

ain't good enough, well, stop art there. What you want to come 'ome for at all, any of you? Stop there, I says, with yer narsty blackbirds. [*Buries her face in her hands.*

ALFRED [*delighted with his success*]. That's the right way to look at it, Sal! I'm glad you're coming rarnd to see it.

SALLY. If it's true what you say about George, he ain't fit to come 'ome. And that's all abart it.

ALFRED [*humbly*]. That's quite right, Sally.

SALLY. And you ain't fit to be here, walking abart among respectable people.

ALFRED [*apologetically*]. Well, of course, I *'ad* to come 'ome, same as I *'ad* to go art. I ain't spared meself. I'm as bad as George. I admits that. Only I was unlucky, and come 'ome.

SALLY [*brutally*]. Then get art there again, can't you?

ALFRED [*touching his wound stripes*]. Well, there you are. They won't 'ave me. Nobody wants you when you got too many of these on.

SALLY [*a little mollified*]. You know your wounds is no disgrice to you. But what you've told me is.

ALFRED. Wounds is no disgrice, no. But they're a bit of a 'indrance. [*He pauses a moment.*] There's many a man comes home to 'is girl, cut up ten times worse than me. *Do you think they want 'im?*

SALLY [*whispering*]. Blind p'r'aps? [*Slowly*] A girl ort to stand by that. . . . She'd see *him*, anyway.

ALFRED. There's worse than that. I could tell you of one fellow, Lord love me! [*For once* ALFRED *is serious.*] If he'd had a girl, I should like to know if *she'd* welcome him. He's got one leg left, here. This arm was blowed away at the shoulder. He's got just a little sight in one eye, and that must go in time. And—and—something worse than that, Sally.

SALLY [*horrified*]. What?

ALFRED. It ain't nice to tork abart, but his fice is all gorn like. And he was a feller you'd have people turn in the streets to look at before that shell caught him. And he 'ad a girl, I know, waiting for 'im at 'ome, in Blighty like. Getting the things p'r'aps ready for the 'ome, when he come back, you know. A fine girl he said she was, like would have made a fine mate for 'im, as he was. Gawd, if she'd seen 'im, as he lay there in that shell-'ole! It *might* 'ave broke 'er 'art, but there isn't a woman could 'ave—wanted 'im.

SALLY [*unsteadily*]. And he did 'ave a girl—like that?

ALFRED. Well, you see, I went through the things in his pockets like—for any letters or anything he might have carried. You see, I never thort he'd be fit to be moved. You couldn't lift 'im or nothing, like, and we was being drawn back——

SALLY. I never knew you was a steretcher-party.

ALFRED. Well, it wasn't like that. Not exactly. [*Uncomfortably*] It was like, I farnd him like, in this shell-'ole. I couldn't leave 'im, of course, so I stopped by 'im. We was in that 'ole two nights and a day, before our men, you know, like recovered the ground, like, and, as I say, I went through his pockets.

SALLY. And this girl, Alf?

ALFRED. Well, you know what a soldier's wallet is like. You know, picture postcards like, and all that. Well, he'd just one, you know, of a girl. This girl of 'is it was, and he asked for it, you know, motioning like. And do you know what he done when I 'eld it up in front of 'im? He put his left 'and art, and tore it in 'arf. He meant that was finished, you see, as far as that was concerned. Then presently he gets better, you know, and patched up, and a sort of new fice like they makes now, you know, but he was finished with that girl. "No," he said, "it ain't good enough." Can you *blime* 'im?

SALLY [*faint and sick*]. Why do they sive them like it?

ALFRED. Life's sweet, I suppose. He'd done work since, you know. He was all right, I heard, for his work. He'd acted straight to his girl, and that's all he got.

SALLY [*thickly*]. Why did they have a war at all, to spoil everything for everybody?

ALFRED. You arsk me another. [*He looks at her.*

## ACT II

SCENE: SAM BILSON'S *coffee-house.*

*The counter is at the back, facing the audience. The window, frosted half way up, occupies the left, and the door leading to the street is also left. The right wall is blank. The usual tables and forms.* SALLY'S *hat and coat hang on pegs in the top left-hand corner.*

*On the rise of the curtain a man is seen who has fallen asleep at the table left, and another is eating at the corner of the table to centre.* SALLY *is washing up at the place to right at top of stage, and* BILSON, *who has just come down the shop, is in the act of waking the sleeping man.*

SAMUEL BILSON *is a large, stout, and fair man of forty-five, in shirt-sleeves, no collar, and wearing a white apron over fawn-coloured linen-looking trousers of enormous girth. He has a fair and sweeping and curled moustache, and an almost shaven head. He bustles, and shouts, and generally 'gets on with it,' with always a stern demeanour coupled with a personality that is quite childish in the very seriousness*

*with which he takes himself. He is in the act of shaking the drowsy customer who snores loudly.*

BILSON. Come along. Come along. This isn't a lodging-harse.

MAN [*waking*]. What's the matter?

BILSON. You've had your coffee. Come along. Artside, please.

MAN [*stupidly*]. Orl rite.

[*The* MAN *stumbles to his feet, yawns, and stretches, and* BILSON *shepherds him to the door, the* SECOND MAN *turning to watch.* BILSON *shuts the door on his departed customer and bustles to the back of the shop, snatching the man's empty cup as he passes, and with his eye on the* SECOND MAN. *He passes the cup to* SALLY *with a clatter, and immediately commences cutting bread and butter to left of table at back, talking to* SALLY *as he does so, in a singsong voice with his accustomed absurd severity.*

BILSON [*looking at customer*]. What time's them 'addocks coming?

SALLY. Soon as they get 'em in, I suppose.

BILSON [*still cutting bread*]. You can go down the market at ten o'clock. You'll see the list 'anging over your 'ed. [*Bangs down a hunk of bread.*] Don't get no cabbage like you did last time. You can see if they've got any pieces at Free's stall. Get 'em fat. [*Bangs down another hunk.*] And don't give more than tenpence. [*To the man at the middle table.*] Finished that tea there?

SECOND MAN [*dangerously*]. Yus.

BILSON. Want anything more?

SECOND MAN [*filling pipe*]. No.

BILSON [*coming through counter flap quickly*]. Then get a move on, please. That table's just going to be scrubbed.

SECOND MAN. I 'aven't been 'ere five minutes, 'ave I?

BILSON. We don't want no tork abart it. Will you get along art, please?

SECOND MAN [*getting up. After a pause and looking at* SALLY]. I 'ear they wants a bloke like you. . . . Chucker art at the Café Royal.

BILSON [*ignoring* SECOND MAN *and addressing* SALLY *while he clears up table*]. If you see any radishes darn the market, you can get a couple of bundles. You'd better get on washing them tables, if you done there.

SECOND MAN [*who has been waiting at the door*]. Very nice to get alone with the girl, ain't it?

BILSON. Eh?

SECOND MAN. Never mind the customers, as long as you can do your bit of cuddling——

[*The* SECOND MAN *hereupon makes a dash out of the shop, as*

BILSON, *with furious passion, makes a rush at him. The door has slammed before* BILSON *reaches it, but he opens it and looks out up the street. Then he shuts the door again and turns table and puts things on counter.*

BILSON. I'll break his neck if he comes here again. Can't keep me shop to meself, nar then!

SALLY. Oh, yes, you can, Sam Bilson, all to yerself. I'll finish here on Saturday, if that'll suit you.

BILSON. Don't talk so silly. What's the matter? What he said?

SALLY. What he said was too true.

BILSON. That I'm 'ere cuddling you when the shop's empty? [*He draws nearer.*] I wish it was.

SALLY. Well, cuddling's a game two plays at, and I ain't fond of games of chance, see? . . . Look here, boss, you're making a proper fool of yourself, if you want to know. Getting the shop talked about.

BILSON. Well, let 'em tork. [*Suddenly leaning over counter*] The shop's yours to-morrow if you'll 'ave it.

SALLY. Oh, I'll 'ave it right enough. What? Are you going to give it me?

BILSON. Don't talk so silly. [*Walks to window.*] As if you didn't know what I mean. You can put the name up there to-morrow if you like—Mrs Bilson!

SALLY. It do sound pretty, don't it, and everything in the garden's lovely. [*She sings.*] 'Ere, go and open that door. Don't want anyone to come in and find you talking to me like this.

BILSON [*going behind counter and speaking over her shoulder*]. I'm arsking you to let me put it up on the front of the shop—Mrs Bilson. What's wrong with that? And furvermore, what's wrong with me?

SALLY. There's plenty of you. There's that abart it, ain't there? It's a good job you was over age, Sam, or you'd 'ave taken three men's risk.

BILSON. Well, a fine girl like you don't want 'arf a man.

SALLY. No, and I don't want two in one, see? I'm not a clayrovoyant, but I likes a happy medium, if that ain't too deep for you. . . . [*He looks at her.*] 'Ere, go and open that door, and don't tork so soft.

BILSON [*getting pipe and lighting it*]. P'r'aps you want one of these crocked-up soldiers, as is 'anging abart here. That's more your fancy, is it?

SALLY. Where 'ave you seen a crocked-up soldier?

BILSON. Where have I seen one!

SALLY. There ain't *no* crocked-up soldiers. Not as I sees 'em. [*She speaks with deep feeling.*] If a man's come 'ome with his eyes gorn, he's got a thousand eyes in him to such as some. If he's lost his limbs, I sees him walking whole. Don't talk about it, Sam. There ain't no

crocked soldiers. Gawd 'elp 'em, they ain't crocked. If a man's got breath in him to live at all, he's a whole man, I tell you, after that art there.

BILSON [*rather upset*]. I know what you mean, Sal. I ain't much to be prard of. But I was over ige, so I 'opes there ain't no 'arm in me size, like. [*Busies himself with account-book on the left of the till.*

SALLY [*half dreaming*]. I 'eard of a chap—yesterday. A chap what was smashed right up, and they patched him rarnd again, and—and there he is. And the bloke what told me arsked, "What'd his girl say to him?"

BILSON. Well, there's got to be common sense and judgment in this life, after all, Sal.

SALLY. There ain't. There's got to be common feeling, that's all there's got to be. What can you make of this life, after all? What's there to be afride of? If a chap was good enough when he was strong and hearty. [*She is really upset.*] Is there a girl'd turn him darn? A feller who left her fine and strong. It'd break his 'eart if she turned from 'im. She—couldn't.

BILSON [*after a pause*]. *Is it George Miles, then, like that?*

SALLY [*turning away*]. No, he ain't like that, Sam.

BILSON. Well, why can't you look on the bright side of me, then? The bigger the clard the bigger the lining—put it that way. Walk art with me. Try me company a bit. Come to 'Ampstead wiv me on bank 'oliday. [*He would become tender.*] Sal, say the word quick while the shop's empty, and come art with me.

SALLY [*throwing cloth at him*]. Shut it, can't you? You put your narsty hands on me, I'll smack yer eye for you. I don't want *no* man, and that's all abart it. You nor nobody else.

BILSON. Look 'ere, Sal—— Oh, blarst! [*The shop door opens, and he quickly moves to left end of counter and changes to his business singsong.* JIM SEARS *and* ALFRED COPE *enter the shop.* SEARS *is in khaki and* ALFRED *in a rough weekday suit, without his wound chevrons, but with his badge and Mons ribbon. Through* BILSON'S *speech they come and sit at centre table.*] If you can get a couple of nice eels skinned and chopped, you can bring 'em darn in a bag. We want some suet. And find art why them 'addocks 'aven't come. You'd better get along now.

[*Comes down to centre table.*

JIM. 'Morning, Sal, Sam.

ALFRED. Sam, Sal.

SALLY [*getting her hat and jacket*]. 'Morning.

JIM. You abart the same, then, Sam? Didn't drop no bombs on you, I see.

BILSON. I'm abart the same, thank you.

JIM. Not quite so start, I don't think. What are you going to 'ave, Alf?

ALFRED. Oh, anyfink.

JIM [*to* BILSON]. What you got?

BILSON. Ain't got me 'addocks come or nothing yet. Cup of coffee

JIM [*takes out packet of cigarettes and having taken one pitches it t* ALFRED]. Orl rite, then, couple of corfees. [SALLY *moves down left o the way out of the shop.*] Don't be art all the morning, Sal. I want a tork with you.

SALLY [*sourly*]. This ain't a torking shop. You arsk the boss abar that.

BILSON. Orl rite. Get along with it, please. [BILSON *shuts the doo on* SALLY.] Two corfees. [*He goes up the shop behind the counter.*]

JIM [*to* ALFRED, *sitting back in his seat*]. Sal ain't changed much.

ALFRED. She's all right.

JIM. Well, what is this nar you fancy you don't want her to know abart?

ALFRED [*dangerously*]. There's no fancy abart it. We've 'ad the jol 'ere, you know, of looking after Sal.

JIM. Whach you mean?

ALFRED. She don't know abart his being smashed up. That's wha I mean. And she ain't got to know, neither.

JIM. What's his being smashed up to do with it?

ALFRED. Let him be finished. That was his own wish, and you know it. You was there. You saw him when he was brort in. I've kept it up orl rite since I was 'ome, and you gotter do the sime. I can't 'elp it, the way Sal's took it—won't believe, and all that. That can't be 'elped.

JIM. You makes me larf.

ALFRED. I don't grudge yer larfing. But you leave the girl alone, that's all. She ain't got to know, and that's all abart it.

JIM. You don't know 'arf, Alf.

ALFRED. And you'd better watch that smile of yours, because I don't like it.

JIM. Do you know what it is I'm larfing at? [*He leans across the table.*] 'Ow long is it since *you've* seen ole Miles?

[SAMUEL BILSON *pauses to listen from the back of the shop.*

ALFRED. How long? I *ain't* seen 'im since we bofe went in the clearing-station. He's written me, though. I know 'ow he was patched up, and all that; if that's what you mean.

JIM [*significantly*]. What was he, then?

ALFRED. Ard you mean? What was 'e?

JIM. What was 'is rank?

ALFRED. Corporal. Darn for his third stripe.

JIM. And recommended for a commission, what?

ALFRED. I never knew it.

JIM. No, you come 'ome. You got your discharge on that job, I know. He come 'ome, too. P'r'aps you don't know that.

ALFRED. I know he come 'ome. And went art again.

JIM. Do you know he went back with a pip up? A staff job, 'cos he spoke 'Ebrew?

BILSON [*coming up from the back of the shop with the coffee*]. What, George Miles an officer!

JIM. Officer be blowed, he's a blinking colonel, with his tabs up.

BILSON [*putting down the coffee*]. George Miles!

ALFRED [*not at all disturbed*]. Sal Winch'd tell you to try again, Jim.

JIM. It's a fact as I sit here. He's come 'ome Colonel Miles, on my trine, what got in yesterday. It's right. He's a colonel. That's the man what's frown over Sally. And why? . . . That's the man what said she ain't on no account to learn the trufe abart him. Wounds! He'd his eye on his commission long before he got his wounds, 'e 'ad. He was to be a gentleman and an officer he was—not the likes of you and me. Too good for Sally Winch! Well, let her know it. Because he ain't coming back to her no more, is that any reason why I gotter keep my marth shut? No! Let her know the trufe of it, and give a fair chance to them as——

[*The shop door opens and* SALLY *comes in. She goes up the shop, while the others pause awkwardly.* BILSON *moves right.*

SALLY [*to* BILSON]. I never took that list. [*She takes it from where it hangs, and then looks round at the others. She comes to their table.*] What are you two working art between you, nar then?

ALFRED. That's all right, Sal.

BILSON [*blustering*]. You know if I don't 'ave them 'addocks in 'ere quick, I may as well shut up for the day.

SALLY. All right.

[*She takes a steady look at the men, and goes to the door,* BILSON *following her.*

BILSON. You know abart the suet? Or' rite.

[*He opens the door for her.*

[SALLY *passes out, and* SAMUEL BILSON, *having shut the door, turns back to the others.*

BILSON. Well, if it ain't the wounds, what's keeping him away, Alf? I reckon the girl ort to be told the trufe. It ain't fair to keep a young woman 'anging abart. Besides, it don't give others a fair chance.

ALFRED. I want to know if what Jim says is true. I've told so many blinking lies abart the job meself that I can't blime others.

JIM. Any man what come back yesterday with our lot will tell you the same.

ALFRED. Well, it's got me beat, Jim. And if it's right——

BILSON [*going to counter*] There's nothing for it but to tell the girl.

ALFRED. She's fixed already, as it 'appens.

JIM [*touchy*]. Who's fixed her?

ALFRED. I have.

BILSON [*coming down to table centre, equally alarmed*]. Ard you mean

ALFRED. Well, I told 'er different. But I fixed George. I saw i was no use going on with Jim 'ome, and I told her, well first that h was a sergeant-major, and it 'ad swelled his head. Then I said he'd got another girl, and that did it.

BILSON. She swallowed that?

ALFRED. Yus.

BILSON. Well, that's good enough, then.

JIM. Cert'nly.

ALFRED. Well, if it ain't, she won't swallow this other. I tell you she's been told too many lies to take any more. Besides, this ain't so much different from telling her abart the sergeant-major.

JIM [*his face towards* BILSON]. Not a sergeant-major wouldn't think so. [*Gloomily*

ALFRED [*finishing his coffee and getting up*]. Leave it at that, ther As long as we all say the same thing——

JIM. And all got the same chance.

ALFRED. Not me. I haven't. I've properly queered my pitch, I have, telling her fings abart meself as never 'appened, so as to make the other more plausible like.

JIM [*tickled*]. Well, that's your fateded fault, Alf. Not mine.

BILSON. Well, look 'ere, lads. He's a sergeant-major, got another girl. Art there, or where?

ALFRED. Art there. Alexandria. A girl called Lily, I think I said it was, and a lot of black 'uns as well, so that he's going like a native like.

JIM [*admiringly*]. You didn't 'arf shpred it on, Alf.

ALFRED. I 'ad to shpred it.

[JIM *rises.* JIM *and* ALFRED *move over to door.*

BILSON. Ain't going to wait and see her, then?

JIM. No, I think we'd better give it a rest this morning.

BILSON. Who's paying for the coffee?

ALFRED [*going back*]. Sorry, I fergot.

BILSON. Threpence, please.

ALFRED. Or' right, Jim; I'm paying for this. [*He puts the coppers on the table.*] Let's get a move on before Sal comes back, and, mind, we ain't been torking abart her at all, Sam.

BILSON [*taking up the cups and going to till with coppers*]. Or' rite.

[*As* JIM *and* ALFRED *move towards the door it opens to admit*

FLORRIE. *She is barelegged in an old velvet dress, yet which does not make her look a slattern. Her hair is loose down*

*her back, with no hat, and the sleeves of her frock are short. She looks at the men, and then shrinks as it were into herself, looking delightfully bashful, lowering her head and eyes except for shy and half-smiling glances. Thus she comes a little way into the shop,* ALFRED *and* JIM *both standing back to let her enter, and* JIM *turning to watch her. She pauses before* BILSON. ALFRED *goes off.*

BILSON. Yes, my dear?

FLORRIE [*shyly and almost whispering*]. Have you got a piece of cake, please?

BILSON. How much?

FLORRIE. Two penn'orth. Father said he'd come in and pay for it presently.

BILSON [*sternly*]. Now, my girl. That won't do. None of that, please. There's the door.

JIM [*going over to them*]. That's orl rite. Let 'er 'ave it with me. Give 'er sixpenn'orth. [*He hands over the money.*

BILSON [*taking the money*]. What, sixpenn'orth of cike?

JIM. Sixpenn'orth of cike, yes.

[JIM *stands looking down at* FLORRIE, *who hangs her head.*

ALFRED [*from door as he re-enters*]. Come on, Jim.

JIM. What's your nime, kid?

FLORRIE [*with a thrill of her shoulders, moving a foot, and still looking down, whispering*]. Florrie Small.

JIM. 'Ave a glass of ginger-beer with yer cike?

FLORRIE. Yes.

BILSON [*behind counter*]. A ginger beer?

JIM. Yes.

BILSON. Tuppence. [JIM *puts down twopence.*

ALFRED. Look 'ere, Jim. Sal'll be back in harf a minute for a cert, you know.

JIM [*irritably but impressed*]. Orl rite. Good-bye, Florrie.

FLORRIE [*whispering*]. Good-bye.

[JIM *and* ALFRED *go out, closing the door after them.* BILSON *brings* FLORRIE *down her cake and ginger-beer.* FLORRIE *sits down centre of centre table, and* BILSON *sits watching her as she begins to eat.*

BILSON. How old are you now, Florrie?

FLORRIE. Fifteen.

BILSON. Well, if you ain't careful, you'll get yourself in trouble one day. That's all I'm telling you. What was that abart 'arf a crarn here on Saturday night?

FLORRIE [*sulkily*]. There wasn't nothing.

BILSON. Well, I know very well there was, then.

FLORRIE [*defiantly*]. If you know, what you want to arsk me for, then?

BILSON. And I don't want no lip abart it, neither. See? If things 'appen in my shop, I want to know what it is. Nar then, you tell me what it was.

FLORRIE [*beginning to cry*]. I only know I nearly got 'arf killed over that 'arf a crarn. [*She sobs.*

BILSON. Who 'arf killed you? [*The only reply is a succession of choking sobs, which makes* SAMUEL BILSON *very uncomfortable.*] 'Ere, you can stop that, Florrie. You don't want to carry on like that now. Don't be so silly. Who 'arf killed you, I siy?

FLORRIE [*choking*]. Sally.

BILSON. What! Sally 'arf killed you?

FLORRIE. She did.

BILSON. What for?

FLORRIE. She broke Farver's 'arf a crarn, and told Muvver she gave me another. She never gave me another.

BILSON. When she tell your muvver this?

FLORRIE. It was a lidy in the court told Muvver. Now Farver'll frash me again to-night over that. I wish I was dead, I do.

BILSON [*very uncomfortable*]. Here, don't tork so silly. [*Being a simple man, he is puzzled and frowning.*] I thort you sed Sally 'arf killed you?

FLORRIE. So she did. Got me darn the court by meself last night, and set on to me.

BILSON. Slapped your face, I suppose, for being saucy?

FLORRIE. I never sauced 'er. And she 'it me in the back for nuthink.

BILSON. If Sally 'it you, she 'it you for something. . . . What you going to do abart this 'arf a crarn, when your farver 'ears of it?

FLORRIE [*her voice breaking*]. I daren't go 'ome to-night.

[BILSON *stands up, restless. There is only the sound of* FLORRIE'S *sobs. After fidgeting for some moments* BILSON *puts a hand on her shoulder.*

BILSON. You swear it's the trufe abart this 'arf a crarn, my girl?

FLORRIE. Muvver finks I 'ad it, 'cos of what the lidy said.

BILSON. *Did you 'ave one off Sally Winch?*

FLORRIE. No, I never.

BILSON. And your farver'll belt you over it, will 'e, to-night?

FLORRIE. I shan't go 'ome.

BILSON. Well now, look 'ere, I'll give you the 'arf a crarn, and we won't say no more abart it. Only you be a good girl, see, and go 'ome and give it to yer farver. [*Goes to till.*

FLORRIE [*standing up and following him, her head hung as she listens obediently*]. Yes.

BILSON. Go strite 'ome, and when you're arsked you've got it in yer pocket. They carn't do nothink to you then. You can say as Sally's given it to you since. See?

FLORRIE [*impatient to be gone*]. Yes, Mr Bilson.

BILSON [*giving her the half-crown*]. Well, what do you siy?

FLORRIE. Thank you very much, sir.

[*She ends with a sob, and moves to the door.*

BILSON [*going with her to the door and patting her shoulder*]. That's right. You get along now.

[SAMUEL *passes* FLORRIE *out, closes the door on her, looks over the top of the frosted glass for a moment, and comes back into the shop. He collects* FLORRIE'S *plate and glass, and takes them up the shop. Suddenly he bursts into shrill whistling, and recommences cleaning table centre. Then the street door opens and* SALLY *comes in, carrying parcels with which she goes up the shop.*

SALLY [*looking about her as she hangs up her hat and jacket*]. You got ridder those two, then?

SAMUEL. Yes. What abart them 'addocks?

SALLY. He hadn't opened the box, so I didn't wait. [*After a pause*] What was those two on about in here?

SAMUEL [*assuming indifference*]. Oh, arguing the point, you know.

[*He works very busily.*

SALLY. Something for you to hear, for you to tell me, I suppose?

SAMUEL. They wasn't 'ere not five minutes. And they never said nothink.

SALLY. They'd got their heads together for something, though.

SAMUEL. Look here, Sal, while the shop's empty, I'll arsk you again —when are you going to come art wiv me? [A*s the street door is kicked open, and the bell rings on the door*] Blarst! Them 'addocks! [A BOY *pushes open the door with his foot, deposits a box of fish on the nearest table, and goes out without taking the slightest notice, but turns back when* SAMUEL *calls to him.*] 'Ere you are. 'Arf a minute. Two empties.

[SAMUEL *goes up to the back and brings down a couple of empty fish-boxes, which the boy goes off with, making no sign of any human interest in the proceeding.* SAMUEL *turns over the top fish in the box, and takes the latter to the back of the shop. After a pause, while laying a row of haddocks on a plate, he speaks.*

Well, what abart it, Sal?

SALLY [*a step towards him*]. You tell me first what they was talking abart in here this morning.

SAMUEL. They was torking abart George, if you must know.

SALLY. What abart him?

SAMUEL. Jim Sears, he 'ad some tile abart 'im and the girls art there, and 'is promotion and that. Ain't you been told yerself?

SALLY. I want to know if it's the same, what Jim said.

SAMUEL. I only 'eard 'em say he was a sergeant-major, and speak of a girl art there.

SALLY. What was the nime of the girl?

SAMUEL. The nime of the girl? Violet p'r'aps it was. I couldn't be sure.

SALLY. Oh!

SAMUEL. Well, it was the nime of a flaar, anyway. Daisy, p'r'aps it was. And there was black girls, and all.

SALLY [*after a pause*]. All right, then, Sam.

SAMUEL. What?

SALLY. I'll come art with you Sunday.

SAMUEL [*delighted*]. You mean that?

SALLY [*who is very sick*]. Yes. I mean to let Jim Sears and Alf Cope see it's no good coming rarnd after me, anyway. While I'm with you, I can't very well be with them, can I?

SAMUEL [*hurt*]. Well, I 'ope you mean it a little bit more for me than just keeping them away like.

SALLY. You take it or leave it, just like that, Sam Bilson. I don't want none of you. I told you that already.

SAMUEL [*after a short silence*]. It's a very nice tram-ride to go from 'ere to Finchley, and take the motor-bus home rarnd Barnet way. [*Pause.*

SALLY [*rising and going round counter to shelf. Abruptly; feeling on a shelf*]. What you done with that 'arf a crarn I left up here on Saturday night? That one I told you as I broke in two?

SAMUEL. I've got that all right—the pieces. In me pocket. That girl Florrie Small what brort it 'ere; she was 'ere just now.

SALLY. Oh? Well, what did she 'ave to say?

SAMUEL [*uncomfortable*]. Nuthink.

SALLY. Poor little devil. I gave 'er another out of me own pocket on Saturday night, but she kept that dark. Took a hiding from 'er farver, so as to keep it to 'erself. I don't blime 'er. She's terrified half art of her senses.

SAMUEL. You *did* give her that 'arf a crarn?

SALLY. I just said so, didn't I? What abart it?

SAMUEL. Oh—nuthink.

[*He goes quickly to peg and begins to get into his coat and find his hat.*

SALLY. You are going out nar, then?

SAMUEL. Yes. I'm—I'm just going rarnd to pay for them 'addocks!

[SAMUEL *goes down the shop towards the door. Before he reaches it it is thrown open, and* TOD SMALL *drags in* FLORRIE.

SMALL *is an undersized and villainous-looking rough of five-and-forty.*

SMALL [*at door*]. 'Arf a minute, Mr Bilson. I want a word abart my girl.

SAMUEL [*who is furious*]. So do I.

SMALL [*holding* FLORRIE *out at arm's length by a grip on the neck of her frock, and a half-throttling twist of it*]. I want to know the trufe abart this 'arf a crarn. Did she 'ave another one back, or didn't she?

SALLY [*quietly*]. What does she say?

SMALL. She says she never.

SALLY. Well, that's true. She never did. Do you think I was going to give 'er 'arf a crarn of me own money?

SAMUEL. 'Ere, Sal! [*He turns to* SMALL.] When did you arsk her larst if she'd got 'arf a crarn on her, or not?

SMALL. Artside this shop. 'Arf a minute ago I arsked her.

SAMUEL. What she siy to you?

SMALL. No, she ain't got no 'arf a crarn.

SAMUEL. Look in 'er pocket, behind 'er dress there.

[SMALL *drags* FLORRIE *to him, and she screams out.*

FLORRIE. I ain't, Father. Gawd's trufe, I ain't.

[*It takes* SMALL *but a few moments to turn out* FLORRIE's *pocket. He finds the half-crown, and flings* FLORRIE *away from him, where she stands transfixed with terror.* SALLY *is so far simply looking on, very quietly.*

SMALL [*with deadly intensity*]. Never 'ad it, did you?

[*He puts it in a trouser-pocket, and begins to unbuckle his belt.*

SAMUEL. I gave it the girl to get art of this. Now let 'er 'ave it. I'd 'ave no mercy on a child like that.

SMALL. I'll give 'er mercy. [FLORRIE *runs to* SALLY *behind centre table.*] Never you mind, Sam Bilson. [*To* FLORRIE, *with the belt now in his hand*] Come over 'ere, where I can reach you.

FLORRIE. Father!

SMALL. Come and stand where I tell you to.

SALLY. Stand where you are, Florrie. He's not going to touch you.

SMALL [*to* SALLY]. What!

SALLY. What I said. You'll not 'it 'er, Tod Small.

SAMUEL. Blarst me—the little devil's 'ad 'arf a crarn of my money. The farver's got a right to correct his child. Well, let 'im do it.

[*Goes up to counter by till.*

SALLY [*very quietly*]. Let 'im, yes. If I can't prevent it.

SMALL. You stand on one side. She's my girl, ain't she? I'll belt the life art of 'er. I'll swing for 'er. Stand on one side.

[*There is a moment's pause.* SMALL *means business, and* SALLY *knows it.*

SALLY. You'll swing for me, not 'er, Small. You'll never pass me.

SMALL. What's she to you? She's my child, ain't she?

SALLY. And more shame to you that you ever had one. Gawd, th pigs in the sties is clean to you! Your child. Beaten and kicked an bruised because never till this day 'ave you been man enough to pu 'er art of 'er misery and hang for 'er. For hang you shall if you la one hand on her.

SMALL. Stop your jaw, and get on one side.

SALLY. A couple of fine men you are, ain't you!

SAMUEL [*coming down stage and speaking to* SMALL]. Look 'ere, you tike the girl artside and do what you like with her. Sal's right. You ain't going to do it in my shop.

SALLY. He'll do it nowhere. Inside the shop or artside it, and I've finished with *you*, Sam Bilson, and don't mistake it. As for you, Tod Small, I'll tell you something worse than 'anging. Seven years for a coiner, what?

SMALL. Seven what? [*But he is terrified at the word.*

SALLY. You ain't got the pluck to hang. And you ain't got the pluck to face me nar. I know your 'arf a crarns. We've got one here. Strap that belt on yourself, and march off. Never mind about hanging. Seven years'll be good enough for you. Put your belt on and march off.

SMALL. A man can't be farver to his own child, nar then!

SALLY. Not you no longer. No. Florrie comes 'ome with me now. You put your fice in anywhere near where she is, then swing if you like, or do your seven years if you like. I know what you'll do. You'll keep that mug art of my way. [*With a sudden flare of startling rage*] Are you going or ain't you?

SMALL [*to* SAMUEL, *who comes down a little*]. A nice thing, ain't it? Interference between a parent and 'is child. That's what this is.

SALLY. Get on art.

SMALL [*putting on his belt as he moves to the door*]. All right. But Gawd blast 'er when I do find 'er. That's all abart it.

[*He goes out.* FLORRIE *is beginning to sob quietly.* SAMUEL *is very sheepish.*

SALLY. I'll get my 'at and things, Florrie, and we'll go 'ome now.

[FLORRIE *goes to door.* SALLY *goes up the shop, and* SAMUEL *follows her. She gets her hat and jacket.*

SAMUEL [*as* SALLY *passes him to go down to the door*]. Look 'ere, Sal. You ain't in the right over this, you know.

SALLY. All I can say is, if I was the woman as married you, and chanced seeing you a farver, I'd drarn meself. Come on, Florrie.

[SALLY *opens the door for* FLORRIE, *who passes out,* SALLY *following.*

# ACT III

## Scene I

SALLY'S *room in Bridewell Court.*

*A clean and tidy attic room. A window in wall at back. Fireplace in left wall. A door in right wall. A bed in the angle of the left and the back wall, and a chair and table forward to left of centre. A washstand is on the left of the window. Below the door is a chest of drawers, and over the chest of drawers, hung against the right wall, is a small cupboard. On the table is a mirror taken from the mantelpiece, propped up against a jug taken from the washstand. The only other chair is one near the foot of the bed. Vases on the mantelpiece, and some clothes hanging against the door.*

FLORRIE, *alone in the room, sits at the left side of the table looking into the propped mirror, and engaged in rouging her lips and cheeks. She is decidedly tidier than before, having shoes and stockings. Engrossed in her work at first, she stops suddenly to listen, and she hears footsteps ascending the stairs outside. Very quickly, she rubs off the rouge with the inside of her skirt, and, flying about the room, replaces first the mirror, then the jug. She has put the mirror on the mantelpiece, and goes back there for a quick glance, finally standing rather breathlessly waiting, and watching the door. After a pause there comes a knocking.*

FLORRIE. Who's that?

[GEORGE MILES *answers from outside; opening the door an inch.*

MILES. Sal Winch?

FLORRIE. She lives 'ere. Yes. Show yerself, can't you? Come in.

[*The door opens, and* MILES *enters. He is a tall, bronzed, and seemingly intact man of thirty-five. He is dressed in a coster's rig of 'pearlies,' bell-bottom trousers, and a twisted yellow handkerchief at his neck. He takes off the cap he is wearing, and* FLORRIE *stares at him puzzled and delighted, for he is a pleasing figure.*

MILES. I'm looking for Miss Winch. This is 'er plice, ain't it?

FLORRIE [*hesitating*]. Yes. It's 'er plice.

MILES. What abart my coming in? Is it all right? I want to speak abart 'er.

FLORRIE. I suppose you can, yes.

MILES [*standing just inside the door*]. She lives 'ere, don't she?

FLORRIE. Who are you? What you want, anyway?

MILES [*looking about him*]. Got a message. That's all.

FLORRIE. Well, she's art for the diy [*he moves*]—art for the morning, anyway.

MILES [*hesitant*]. Oh!

FLORRIE. She's art looking for work.

MILES. Yes, I see she wasn't at the corfee-shop. Might I ask who you are?

FLORRIE. I'm her—mate.

MILES. Well—I come in from Sarfampton yesterday. I promised a bloke in Palestine I'd look 'er up. That's all. It ain't anything very perticular. I said I'd find her art, you see. [*Going towards door*] That's all.

FLORRIE. Well, shut the door then, and come in. You don't want 'arf the house to hear you, do you? [MILES *hesitates, and* FLORRIE *passing him, closes the door herself. Then she stands with her back to it,* MILES *now facing her.*] I'm here by meself, but I'm not frightened o' you. Sit down if you like, and wait for her.

MILES. How long?

FLORRIE. Don't arsk me.

MILES [*who is vaguely uncomfortable*]. Well, if you'll just tell me what I want to know, I won't stay, I don't think. I'll come back again afterwards, when she's here p'r'aps.

FLORRIE. Well, there's a chair. You can sit down.

[*She smiles at him.*

[MILES *sits and takes off his hat.* FLORRIE *bringing the second chair sits opposite him. She leans forward, an elbow on the table and her face in her hand, steadily regarding him; this being a unique opportunity for such an inspection.*

FLORRIE. You remind me of before the War.

MILES. I didn't know I could do that.

FLORRIE. I mean your pearlies and all. But you tell me what you come about?

MILES. Well, I told you. I promised a chap I'd call.

FLORRIE. I'm glad you did. That's straight. I like that ring. Let's have a look at it.

[FLORRIE *stretches out a hand to where* MILES's *hand is on the table.*

MILES [*nervously*]. I think as she ain't here——

FLORRIE. Well, I told you she'd be back in a minute, didn't I? [*Rises and goes behind him.*] I don't want to see your ring.

MILES. It's nothing to see. Look here, I'll come back this afternoon.

[*He is miserably uncomfortable, and rising goes two steps towards the door.*

FLORRIE [*getting to the right of him*]. Don't be like that. That's all

ght. I can tell you a lot about Sally, if you want to know. [*She budders.*] I'd like to tell somebody.

MILES. What d'you say?

FLORRIE. If you'd sit down.

MILES [*hesitating by the chair*]. I never understood she'd got a mate ere at all.

FLORRIE. Well, the War's upset things. Sit down, [*stamps foot*] an't you? Or go if you want to. You'd never understand.

[*She has spoken with a sudden rush of words, which utterly puzzles* MILES.

MILES. Look here. Who are you? What are you driving at?

FLORRIE. Driving? I'm driving at nothing. Only you said you vanted to know, didn't you? You'd better go, I think.

MILES. I want to know what you mean first.

FLORRIE. Well, Sal—she's got the sack, ain't she? If you've been o the shop, I suppose you knew that.

MILES. Why did she get it?

FLORRIE. Something abart—oh, don't ask me.

MILES [*who is getting alarmed*]. Something about what?

FLORRIE. It was something abart half a crown, if you must know. Anyway, she got the sack.

MILES [*clenching his fist*]. You mean anybody's said Sal Winch takes noney!

FLORRIE. What do you know about her, then?

MILES [*with an attempt at caution*]. Nothing. Of course. [*Sits.*

FLORRIE [*going round to top of table*]. You excite yourself over very ittle. You got shell-shock?

MILES. I don't know. P'r'aps I 'ave.

FLORRIE. I've 'ad it all my life, I'm thinking. [*Kneels on chair.*] Do you really want to know abart Sally? [*Leans over table.*] Or did you know I live 'ere with 'er?

MILES. I didn't know. 'Ar could I?

FLORRIE. Well, I do. [*She looks straight at him, and adds*] Worst uck.

MILES. How d'yer mean—worst luck?

FLORRIE. Oh, nothink.

[FLORRIE *gets up with a sigh and passes to the mantelpiece.* MILES *watches her, and there is a pause of some moments. Then* MILES *suddenly perceives that* FLORRIE *is crying. He stares at her.*

MILES. What's the matter? [*Rises.*

[MILES *takes another step towards* FLORRIE *and pauses. He is much disturbed.*

FLORRIE [*suddenly, savagely, so that it is admirable acting*]. Nothink!

[FLORRIE *appears to have thrown off whatever was upsetting her, and now she comes humming and sailing down the room towards* MILES, *much increasing his alarm, rather than allaying it.*] You must think me a mug to cry like that. It's only being shut in here alone so much.

MILES. What is it you do here, then? I should have thought this time of the day you'd have been out at work.

FLORRIE [*she looks at him, and bursts out laughing*]. Work!

MILES. Well, what do you do? What are you here for?

FLORRIE [*she seems about to laugh again. At the last moment, after a long, straight look at him, she changes her mind again and transforms herself back again to the girl in trouble*]. Oh, don't . . . ask me . . . anything abart it. [*She suddenly turns to him, brightening up.*] I like you. I'm glad you come. Don't talk about 'er. Tork to me. I like you. But did I ort to say so?

MILES [*miserably uncomfortable*]. Why not? [*Suddenly he flares into anger.*] I want to know what the blazes you're driving at?

FLORRIE. Do you? Yes? And then you'd be like everybody else.

[*She turns away*

MILES. Look here. Now, what is it?

[*This more gently. He sits left of table*

[FLORRIE *stands with her head hung.*

FLORRIE [*whispering*]. No.

MILES. Yes. You tell me. What's your name?

FLORRIE. Florrie.

MILES. Well, you tell me, Florrie, what it is.

[*She goes to him and kneels.*

FLORRIE [*in a hollow voice*]. I can't tell you.

MILES [*making her face him*]. You've got to.

FLORRIE. I shan't.

MILES. You've got to. What you mean, I don't know. But if it's any trouble that you're in—either of you, I'd 'elp you. Of course I would.

FLORRIE. You—you wouldn't.

[*She breaks away from him, and goes to the mantelpiece again, and in a few moments her thin shoulders are racked with sobs. She throws out her arms along the length of the mantelpiece, and buries her head in them.*

MILES. Look here—— [*He rises and goes to her, and touches her.*] Florrie.

FLORRIE [*keeping her head well down, and sobbing out the words*]. I'm not a bad girl really. . . . I don't wish it . . . I'm mide to be.

MILES. Who makes you—what?

FLORRIE [*suddenly turning and flinging her arms around him*]. Take me away from here—take me away.

MILES [*disengaging himself*]. There's the door, isn't there? [FLORRIE *appeals to him again and moves quickly to his right.*] You can go—can't you? [*He is now in front of the table.*] I'm losing my patience with you, young woman.

FLORRIE. I daren't go. I'd only be brort back.

MILES [*suddenly gripping her*]. Look here, I've had enough of this. What is it you're talking about? Who?

FLORRIE. You're 'urting my arm.

MILES. I'm not 'urting your arm. Tell me what you're talking about, or I might hurt you. Do you hear? Tell me straight what it is.

[*He holds her at arm's length, and* FLORRIE *looks wild and frightened. She is in real pain.*

FLORRIE. Oooooooooo, my arm!

MILES. Your arm's all right.

FLORRIE. I've been beat there. I'm black and blue. It's the trufe!

[MILES *releases* FLORRIE, *in horror.* FLORRIE *tears open her blouse, pulling it off a shoulder. The white flesh is bruised and swollen, and* MILES *stares aghast.*

FLORRIE. That's 'ow I get served, I do. Now you'll believe me, p'r'aps. [*She sobs, and pulls her blouse back into place again.*

MILES. Who—serves you like it?

[*A succession of sobs is* FLORRIE's *only answer.*

[*Beside himself*] Who, I say?

FLORRIE [*dully facing* MILES]. 'Er—Sal Winch!

MILES [*staring at her*]. Gawd!

FLORRIE [*brokenly*]. I didn't mean to tell yer.

MILES. It's just as well you did—Florrie. [*He is very broken, too.*] Just as well. [*He puts a hand on* FLORRIE, *who goes to him, and, hiding her face on his coat, cries heart-brokenly.*] Don't cry, just as I'm going

FLORRIE. Don't go.

MILES. I must. But look 'ere. If I gave you some money, you could clear off out of this, and get work somewhere. Couldn't you, Florrie?

FLORRIE. There's box-factories I could get work at, if I could only live the first week or two.

MILES. All right. [FLORRIE *disengages herself, very curious, and* MILES *at the top of the table produces a wallet, from which he takes three pound notes.* FLORRIE *rushes to the chair left of table and sits.*] See? You have this, and be gone out of here, before she comes back.

FLORRIE [*whispering, and wiping an eye with a sleeve*]. Thank you.

MILES. And look here, Florrie. You know Alf Cope?

FLORRIE. Yes.

MILES. Lives in the court 'ere.

FLORRIE. Yes.

MILES. Well, you could trust him, see? If you wanted more help from me, tell him.

FLORRIE. Tell Alf? Who would I say? [*Rises*

MILES. Have you ever heard of George Miles?

FLORRIE. Yes. He was Sal's——

MILES [*quickly and savagely*]. That's all right, what he was. But I'm George Miles, see?

FLORRIE [*backing away*]. But I used to see him——

MILES. Yes. I expect you did. [*She moves to him.*] I know. I'm not the Miles that went out from here—not by a long shot. I never meant to come back and that's why. Do you see? Because I'm not the Miles she knew. But I farnd I *had* to come, and besides, I don't think she'd have known me, if I'd seen her. And thank Gawd for it. I've parsed people out 'ere to-day [*he points to the court*] that looked frew me as I went by. And I say thank Gawd for it. 'Ere, good-bye, Florrie, I'm getting out of this. [*He goes towards the door and* FLORRIE *follows him.*] Only, don't ferget. You can trust Alf Cope next door. He saved a man's life in Palestine, and I'd trust him with a kid here. Good-bye, Florrie, before I go potty over this job.

FLORRIE [*tearfully*]. You're going?

MILES. Yes, I say.

FLORRIE [*following him*]. Take me with you.

MILES. I can't take you with me. Of course I can't.

FLORRIE [*clinging to him*]. I want to go with you. Take me with you—anywhere. I'm afraid by meself. If you'd take me I'd work me hands off for you.

MILES. Look 'ere, Florrie. I can't do that. It's no good. You know it.

FLORRIE [*crying*]. I like you.

[*The door opens and closes. It is* SALLY *returning, but she is not seen.*

MILES. If you was old enough, and you knew, you wouldn't like me, and don't you think it. But what I can do for you, I will. Look here, you mustn't hold me. [FLORRIE *has been using the opportunity to take* GEORGE'S *wallet.*] Good-bye, Florrie.

[*Suddenly the front door is heard closing, heavily.* FLORRIE *springs from* MILES, *runs to right of table and then over to fireplace, hiding the wallet in her blouse.*

FLORRIE. Listen. [*There are footsteps heard ascending.*] It's her—it's Sally, coming back.

MILES [*staggered*]. Here!

FLORRIE. Yes. It's all right. Quick. Don't look so silly.

MILES. Shh! [*He stares towards the door.*

FLORRIE [*whispering, rapidly*]. She's outside almost. Say you was looking for Alf Cope. You've only come to the wrong house. [*Sits in chair left of table.*] He's next door, here.

[MILES *stands back in confusion as* SALLY *enters. Coming inside, she pauses, and looks from* FLORRIE *to* MILES *and back again, merely naturally, questioningly.* MILES *has turned towards her, and for a moment there is insuppressible yearning in his whole demeanour, until with a deep breath he draws himself up and is the stranger, with something of the colonel in him, too.* FLORRIE *for the moment is abashed, and looks almost guilty. It is only a moment before* SALLY *speaks, very normally.*

SALLY. Yes?

FLORRIE. He knocked at the door a minute ago, to ask for Alf Cope.

SALLY [*to* MILES]. He's not here. He's next door.

FLORRIE. Yes. I just told 'im.

MILES [*affecting a desperate hoarseness, speaking quietly*]. I come to the wrong harse, it seems. Well, you'll excuse me. Thank you, miss, [*to* FLORRIE] and thank you. I'm sorry if I intruded. [*Pause.*

[*As he goes to pass* SALLY *she stands back, her nostrils distended, because she is keeping back a suffocatingly rapid breathing, and hiding a brain-storm of rage and contempt. For a moment she appears about to speak, but it does not happen, and the next moment* MILES *has gone.* SALLY *moves to the window and looks through.* FLORRIE *rises and goes to fireplace.*

FLORRIE [*with a shrug of her thin shoulders, brightly*]. Well, that's that.

[FLORRIE *at the glass on the mantelpiece, humming, and examining herself, really because she is afraid to face* SALLY.

SALLY. Yes. That's that. [*Going to the door, which* MILES *has left ajar, closing it, and going again to the window. She looks at* FLORRIE, *who is still avoiding her, and then speaks, very quietly.*] Florrie.

FLORRIE [*determined not to look round, and playing with a ringlet*]. Hello!

SALLY. Come here, and speak to me.

FLORRIE [*who instinctively sees catastrophe*]. Why?

SALLY. Come here, Florrie.

FLORRIE [*half laughing, nervously*]. Why should I?

SALLY. Florrie, I want you here, please.

FLORRIE [*assuming impatience, but obeying and going to* SALLY *at window*]. What is it, Sally?

[*She looks at* FLORRIE *for some moments rather sorrowfully. They are almost unbearable moments for* FLORRIE. *She*

*moves a chair, rebuttons her blouse, and does anything rather than meet* SALLY's *eyes.*

SALLY. You didn't hear me open the door a minute before I came in, did you, Florrie?

FLORRIE [*looking at* SALLY *at last and sitting on top of table, back to audience*]. No.

SALLY. I came up the stairs before you thought I did. I opened the door, but I didn't want to catch you. . . . Then I went down again and shut the front door loud. I'm telling you, you see. Who did that man come here for? Who did he say he was? [*Slight pause.*

FLORRIE [*sullenly*]. He came here like he said he did, to ask for Alfred Cope.

SALLY. How long was he here?

FLORRIE. He just come.

SALLY. He got very friendly very quick, then.

FLORRIE. He never said nothing to me.

SALLY. It wasn't only what I heard. It was what I saw. You had your arms round him.

FLORRIE. I never. [*Turning round*] He had 'is arms round me.

SALLY. Well, what for?

FLORRIE. I couldn't stop 'im. I was afraid.

SALLY. Why didn't you tell me when I come in?

FLORRIE. 'Cos he said he'd kill me. [*Melodramatically.*

SALLY. Florrie, you couldn't speak the truth if you tried, could you? But you're going to speak it this morning. [*Steps near her.*] Look here. When he came in, what did he say?

FLORRIE. He arsked me if I was Sally Winch.

SALLY [*rather staggered*]. I thought he arsked for Alfred Cope just now.

FLORRIE. I mean he arsked——

SALLY. P'r'aps he arsked if *you* was Alfred Cope. Was that it? . . . Look here, Florrie, I've never done you any unkindness, 'ave I?

FLORRIE [*reluctantly*]. N—no.

SALLY. And you don't like work, do you? [*She gets a scrubbing-brush, pail, etc., from outside the door.*] Well, here's a scrubbing-brush, and a pail of water, and a piece of soap. Now you start scrubbing this floor, and when you want to leave off, you tell me the truth, and *I'll* finish it, see? Here you are.

[*She puts the collected articles before* FLORRIE.

FLORRIE [*after studying the situation*]. Well, suppose I shan't?

SALLY. Then you'd better put your 'at on, and go 'ome.

FLORRIE. All right.

[FLORRIE *finds a hat, goes to the door, turns and looks defiantly at* SALLY, *puts on hat and goes out.* SALLY, *left alone, goes to the table and takes tablecloth from table drawer. Then*

*she moves to the window, and looks down into the street. In a very few moments* FLORRIE *returns, entering the room very slowly and shamefacedly.*

Me muvver's waiting for me out in the court there.

SALLY. She ain't.

FLORRIE. Well, me farver will be—rarnd the corner.

SALLY. Your farver and your mother, too, know what to expect if they touches you again.

FLORRIE. He'd 'it me first and think afterwards. . . . I don't want to go till it's dark.

SALLY [*at fireplace, seeing to kettle*]. Well, take your 'at off, and start scrubbing the floor, then.

[FLORRIE *comes slowly in, puts her hat on the bed, goes reluctantly over to the pail, and then, dropping on her knees beside it, starts scrubbing. Meanwhile* SALLY, *taking no notice of her, hangs up her own hat and jacket and commences to lay the table with cups and saucers, etc., from the cupboard. After a quarter of a minute* FLORRIE, *from whom sniffs have emanated, puts down the brush and looks up.*

FLORRIE. Sally.

SALLY. Yes, Florrie?

FLORRIE. I'll tell you the trufe. . . . That bloke never arsked for Alfred Cope. He was a policeman he was, in his plain clothes [*with a sob in her voice*] looking for my farver. [*Scrubs, then she looks round at* SALLY, *who goes on with her work.*] I put me arms round 'im to arsk him not to tike my farver to prison.

[*Scrubs again and then sits back on her heels.*

[FLORRIE *sobs before* SALLY *speaks.*

SALLY. You try again, Florrie. And get on with your scrubbing.

FLORRIE. That was the trufe.

SALLY [*abruptly*]. All right. Well, I'd better do the scrubbing, then. Get up.

[*She goes over to her.*

FLORRIE. I'll do a bit more, Sally.

SALLY. No, you won't do any more. Get up. [FLORRIE *gets up and stands back, vaguely enraged at being deprived of the privilege now of scrubbing the floor.*] And if you look in my jacket pocket, there's one of these stories I bort you—"'Eartsease Library." You sit on the bed and read it.

[*She starts scrubbing energetically.*

FLORRIE. Which pocket?

SALLY. Use your eyes. [FLORRIE *goes over to* SALLY'S *jacket, finds a paper-covered novelette, and goes to the bed, sitting down.*] I knows you're fond of reading, Florrie.

FLORRIE. Yus.

SALLY. What's it called?

FLORRIE [*she looks at the book. She is conscious that* SALLY *is in some way trying her, and has already made her feel small. Her temper rises, she does not know quite what to do, and rage at her impotence suddenly becomes predominant. It finds expression in a burst of fury, and she hurls the book across the room into the fireplace*]. I don't want your book! Blarst your book!

SALLY [*coolly*]. Give me some water out of the wash-jug, will you?

FLORRIE [*standing up, panting*]. Blarst the wash-jug, and you too. I'll throw that in the fireplace next, if you ain't careful. [*She gets jug.*

SALLY. I should give me the water art of it first. It makes a narsty mess.

FLORRIE [*putting jug down again*]. I don't care what sort of a mess it makes. I should like to break everything in the blarsted world, I would.

SALLY. Well, I should get abart it, then. If you want to smash my jug, and the basin too, you're welcome, if you think it'll do you any good.

FLORRIE. You dare me, I'll do anything.

SALLY. Look here, Florrie, I says again, if it'll do you any good to smash the plice up, you do it. I want you to know a friend when you see one. I brort you 'ere as my mate, didn't I?

FLORRIE. I never arsked to come 'ere.

SALLY. Well, you please yourself. If you want to stay here and you want to break my 'ome up, you break it.

FLORRIE. You're larfing at me.

SALLY. I'm not. I think I know you, though. You came along to be everybody's football, didn't you? I know what you feel towards everything you see—you want to break it, you want to smash it, and you won't value nothing till it's done. This is my 'ome. I can't afford another, but if you'll learn your lesson that there is things worth holding on to in this life, by breaking up everything I value 'ere, then you break 'em up, and I won't say a word against you.

FLORRIE. You're daring me. I told you if you dared me!

SALLY. I've only told you, if it'll do you any good you can do it.

FLORRIE. You and your blarsted kindness! I don't want nobody to be kind to me. Nobody ever 'as been. You're larfing at me all the time nar. I know you are.

SALLY. I've said my say. You do as you like, Florrie.

FLORRIE. And break your 'ome up? You dare me to break your jug, I'll break it now.

[*She goes up, pushing chair out of her way and picks up jug.*

SALLY. All right. I dare you.

FLORRIE [*hurling the jug into the fireplace*]. There's for your jug, then.

SALLY. And now what abart the basin? One's no good without the other.

FLORRIE. What you want to dare me to anythink for?

SALLY. Because I want you to enjoy yourself, and have a day art ›r once. I dare you to break the basin. I dare you to break the ›oking-glass on the mantelshelf. I dare you to break——

FLORRIE [*recoiling*]. Shut it——

SALLY. I dare you to break the cups and saucers on the table. I ·are you to smash them vases, and when you done all that, I'll dare ·ou to something else.

FLORRIE. What's that?

SALLY. Stamp your feet on the little watch George Miles gave me ›efore he went away. If it'll do you any good, you can smash that.

FLORRIE [*moving towards* SALLY]. You're larfing at me. And I'll do ıll you dare me to do.

SALLY. Well, get on with it, then.

FLORRIE. The basin, eh? [*Up to basin*] Well, here's for the basin, :hen! [*The basin follows the jug.* FLORRIE, *now half demented, flies at the mantelshelf.*] Blarst your looking-glass! [*Destroys it.*

SALLY. And the little vases, too, Florrie.

FLORRIE. Blarst your vases, then. [*She sweeps them across the room.*

SALLY [*always perfectly calmly and moving to the table*]. And the cups and saucers.

FLORRIE [*going to the top of the table, and then suddenly breaking down*]. I don't want to smash your things up, Sally. What you want to make me get like this for?

SALLY. To learn you that you've got a friend that'll let you do what you like, see? You've *gotter* smash them cups and saucers.

FLORRIE. I don't want to smash 'em. You dared me to smash the others.

SALLY. I dare you to smash my cups and saucers, then.

FLORRIE [*breathless*]. You dare me to! All right!

[*She destroys them by pulling the cloth from the table. The crockery is scattered over the room.*

SALLY [*going to cupboard*]. That's better . . . and nar my watch, Florrie. It's the only thing I've had to care abart—years, but you're welcome to break it. [*She finds it in a box in the cupboard.*

FLORRIE [*horrified*]. Lee me alone. Don't bring it art. If you do —I'll do it.

SALLY. It's what you want to do. [*She opens the box and draws out by its chain a little gold watch, and puts it on the table.*] There it is, Florrie. And I dare you to break it.

FLORRIE [*throwing herself sobbing on the bed*]. I don't want ter break your watch, Sally.

SALLY. Well, I want you to break it, see? Because I think it will do you good.

FLORRIE. I've been beat to death almost for dropping an ole cracked cup in the street. I don't want to break your nice things up, Sally.

SALLY. You do want to. It does you good. 'Ere, break my watch, and 'ave done with it.

FLORRIE. Why don't you give me a 'iding? I'd rarther you thrashed me than I broke anything else. . . . I don't want to 'urt your watch.

SALLY. You've got to.

FLORRIE. Why?

SALLY. Because you're a coward if you don't. Because I've dared you, see? It's here, and I dares you. I dares you, see?

FLORRIE [*springing from the bed, utterly dishevelled and distracted*]. I won't be dared by anybody.

SALLY. I dares you, Florrie.

FLORRIE. I'll do it if you do!

SALLY. I dares you, Florrie.

FLORRIE. I will, then. His watch. What he gave you. You've made me do it. [*Suddenly she collapses, and goes to* SALLY.] Oh, Sally I can't! I can't! [*She falls on her knees by* SALLY, *burying her face in her lap.*] Sally—I do love you. I'll never tell you no more lies It was 'im. It was George Miles . . . and, Gawd, I told 'im awful lies about you. . . .

SALLY [*in a hollow voice*]. I knew, Florrie. I knew it was him the whole time. If it was his bones, I'd 'ave known them.

FLORRIE. But, Sal. What I told 'im. I'll never tell no lies again. I said awful things. I said you beat me. I said——

SALLY. It don't matter, Florrie. [*Puts watch on table.*] Nothing matters much nar.

FLORRIE [*rising*]. Sal. It ain't like that. He came to see you. And I—pinched his wallet. [*She drags it from her dress.*] And there's your picture in it. I saw the fice.

SALLY. Florrie!

FLORRIE [*opening the wallet*]. Gawd, the notes in it. I never ort to have touched it. And, Sal—your picture——

SALLY [*looking at the wallet*]. It's torn in 'arf!

[*She throws it on the table, and sinks down at the chair, burying her head in her hands.*

FLORRIE [*going to top of table behind* SALLY]. I'll give it back to 'im. I'll take it back, Sal.

[*Moves to door.*

SALLY [*broken utterly*]. That's what he cared for me.

FLORRIE. I'll tike it back. [*Turns at the door.*] I'll tike it back.

[FLORRIE *at door, looking back at* SALLY.

[*The curtain is lowered for a moment to mark the passing of six hours.*

## Scene 2

*The only difference in the room is that it has been tidied after* Florrie's *breakages.* Sally *is standing a little way back from the window, looking down into the court. A piano-organ is heard playing.* Sally *turns from the window to the bed, where she sits down, her head bowed, and her hands clasped. There is the hitch and stop of the organ changing its tune. There is a knock, and the door is pushed open.*

Alfred [*coming just inside the door*]. Can I speak to you, Sally?

Sally [*standing up*]. Yes, Alf.

Alfred [*shutting the door*]. It's abart Florrie . . . and some other fings as well. Do you know she came rarnd to me abart a wallet—harrs ago?

Sally. There was a wallet, Alf, yes.

Alfred. You know whose it was, I know, Sally.

Sally [*expressionlessly*]. It was George Miles's. He was here.

Alfred. Yes, I know.

Sally. Some'ow, I never thort to arsk Florrie where she'd take it back to. I never knew if she'd got the address, or anythink. I never arsked.

Alfred. That part of it's all right, Sal. She came rarnd to me. Miles had told her I'd know where he was. She told me everything what happened here, this morning. How she broke your fings up and all. I know she was speaking the trufe. I don't question that. I gave her George Miles's address. But she ain't never come back.

Sally. How far did she 'ave to go, Alf? [*The organ ceases.*

Alfred. Vaux'all Bridge Road. I ort to have gorn with 'er. I sees it nar.

Sally. If she's walked, she could hardly have been this time.

Alfred. He'd given her three parns himself. She put that back in the wallet; said it wasn't hers to touch, 'cos she'd got it by lies. Then she'd got a lot of pennies of her own. More than enough for the fare. I told her to come back quick, and see me first. I've been watching all the afternoon.

Sally. I can't think she'd have run away.

Alfred. It was a lot of money for her to have on her. But I can't think it either. [*Moves to fireplace.*] Not like she was when she came round to me. . . . George might have given her something to eat, or something.

Sally. He mightn't have been there. [*Going to window*] She might be waiting.

ALFRED. I don't think so. He went back in a cab. He'd got it waiting at a shop in the Whitechapel Road, where he changed into some of the things he was wearing.

SALLY [*turning*]. Changed into them?

ALFRED. Yus. I met 'im there. I 'ad a postcard this morning.

SALLY. What did he change art of, then?

ALFRED. Well, it seems he ain't got no civvies yet, but what you'd recognize. He changed art of that civvy suit what he used to wear, with the stripes on it.

SALLY. Why did he want to deceive me, if he come here at all, Alf?

ALFRED [*going to and sitting on bed*]. He was afride, Sal, how you might tike 'im. And changed like he is, he thort he might see you first, like. Say he was a friend of Miles, like.

SALLY. As if I wouldn't have known him. [*Joining* ALFRED *and sitting on bed*] That's all right in books, Alf. Why, if I'd been blind, I'd 'ave known 'is voice.

ALFRED. 'Is voice! Why, that's as different since after 'is operation

SALLY [*quickly*]. What operation?

ALFRED [*rising and coming down to fireplace*]. Oh—er—he had a tooth art, or something.

SALLY [*going to him and turning him round*]. Still lying and scheming to me, ain't you, Alf? Still 'iding things back. [*Fiercely*] What is the matter with him? Why has he altered like it? Why should he keep from me?

ALFRED [*hand on mantelshelf*]. I came to tell you. He meant to keep it dark, and I gave 'im my oath I'd never let you know. But after what Florrie told me—what she said to him—I made up my mind to break that oaf of mine, see? Only, I've waited for the kid to get back, 'oping against 'ope as he'd come with 'er. Well, I can't wait no longer. It's on me mind like a murder might be, to see you two mates spoiling everyfing for one another, for want of diylight on the subject. I sed to 'im this morning, I sed tell the trufe, I sed.

SALLY. I wish I could believe a word you said, Alf.

ALFRED. Yes. It might be better if you could have. You remember what I told you of the chap what was smashed up in the shell-'ole? What I farnd? Well, that was George Miles, that was.

SALLY. George!

ALFRED. You fink he's all right. You've seen him. You only fink he's altered. Well, so does others fink the sime. [*He becomes intensely serious.*] One arm, and one leg, that's abart what he's got left of what he went away from Stepney with. Why, one blinking eye's a glass one!

SALLY. Alf! [*Ecstatically*] Is it that? Is it only that?

ALFRED. Yus. He finks he's a sort of disgrice to himself. Him, as only went in that shell-'ole after anuvver chap. And that uvver chap

was dead when he got there. There he was messed up like that for uffing. If he hadn't been as bad as he was, I wouldn't 'ave 'alf told 'im off, Sal.

SALLY. And you sived him!

ALFRED. Sived 'im! I could 'ave clipped 'is blinking ear-'ole. [*He becomes serious again.*] You didn't spot it when I told you this before, Sal. But that's when he tore your photograf in 'arf.

SALLY. Alf! I saw it! In the wallet! And I never fort.

ALFRED. No. I don't fink the pair of you ever 'ave. Making too much blinking fuss of yourselves. And upsetting of other people.

SALLY. And he thought I'd turn from him. 'Cos he was broke up —fighting for me.

ALFRED [*holding her*]. But there's one thing you ain't never got to know, Sal. Not if you sees it with your own eyes. You ain't got to take no notice of it, like. It's almost as bad to him as his blooming wounds.

SALLY. What?

ALFRED. You remember what he was like abart that collar, don't you? How he took it off and that? Well, you'll larf when I tell you. But they made George——

SALLY. They did make 'im sergeant-major?

ALFRED. No, he was never that. Heaven be praised, he was never that. *They mide 'im a colonel!*

SALLY. Which is the highest?

[*There comes a yell from the court below.* ALFRED *and* SALLY *stare at one another. Then comes the hysterical voice of* MRS SMALL.

MRS SMALL. My child! My child! [*The noise from below is a hubbub of sound, above which* MRS SMALL *can just be heard screaming.*] My Florrie! Oh, my Florrie!

[ALFRED *throws open the window and looks down.*

SALLY. Oh, what is it, Alf?

ALFRED [*looking back*]. It's something about Florrie. Mrs Small has heard something. I don't know what it is.

[*Suddenly the door opens and* MRS KEMP *comes in.*

MRS KEMP. Sally, I've got something to tell you nar. You sed Florrie'd have her kerridge. I said watch it that it weren't the Black Maria. Well, she's been run in nar for stealing a soldier's wallet. And whose do you think? Your George Miles's. That's for your Florrie.

ALFRED. Who told you so?

MRS KEMP. A chap what saw them run her in. They took her to Dorchester Row off the Vaux'all Bridge Road.

MRS SMALL [*her voice from below*]. Florrie! Florrie! I want my child!

SALLY [*with a sudden gasp as she stares from the window*]. Alf! There is Florrie! Florrie herself! And who's that with her?

ALFRED [*springing to the window*]. Don't you worry. Everything's all right, Sal. [*He bolts out of the room.*

MRS KEMP [*nonplussed*]. How can Florrie be down there if she's run in?

SALLY [*leaning back against the wall*]. She is darn there, I tell you.

MRS KEMP [*going to the window*]. Who's the bloke, then? They're coming here, Sal. [SALLY *moves to down left.*

MRS SMALL [*her voice is heard as before*]. Florrie! Florrie! Don't you know your mother!

[*There is a violent slamming of the front door and murmuring from the street.* ALFRED *is the first to enter the room. The noise in the street has become a murmur.*

ALFRED. I told you it was all right, Sal. It's George. They run Florrie in, and he proved she was taking the wallet back to him.

[GEORGE MILES *enters, with* FLORRIE. GEORGE *is now in an ordinary suit.*

MILES. Sal! It's only George! And this kid we've got to look after. She's told me everything, Florrie 'as.

[*He pulls himself erect, while* FLORRIE *runs to* SALLY.

SALLY [*with bated breath*]. George!

ALFRED. It's six o'clock, Mrs Kemp. You don't want to be wasting your time up here, not with the pubs open. Come long. [*He opens the door and* MRS KEMP *passes out.*] Florrie! It's all right. You come along with me. No, your mother ain't going to touch you. [FLORRIE *goes to* ALFRED, *her eyes fixed on the glory that is in* SALLY'S *face.* ALFRED *puts a hand on her shoulder to take her out. Then he looks at* GEORGE *and* SALLY.] Well, tiddly-o, you two.

[*He casts a horrible wink upon them and disappears with* FLORRIE.

[SALLY *moves over to centre, her hands out.*

SALLY [*whispering*]. Oh, my George.

MILES [*going to her*]. I'm not fit for the likes of you, Sal.

SALLY. The likes of me! It's the likes of you what matters. Which is the arm you can put round me?

[*They both sit on the table, facing one another.*

# THE YOUNG IDEA

## By NOEL COWARD

*First produced at the Savoy Theatre, London, February* 1, 1923

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

George Brent
Gerda, Sholto } *his children*
Jennifer, *his first wife, divorced*
Cicely, *his second wife*
Priscilla Hartleberry
Claud Eccles
Julia Cragworthy
Eustace Dabbit
Sibyl Blaith
Rodney Masters
Huddle, *butler*
Hiram J. Walkin
Maria, *servant at the villa*

MR NOEL COWARD has been called the English Sacha Guitry, and if he has not yet written a *Pasteur* he is young and the comparison has its justice. Mr Coward is, comprehensively, a man of the theatre: actor, playwright, composer of light music, writer of lyrics and revue sketches. He is a man of the *modern* theatre, not experimenting in new forms, but accepting the old (for revue, in the experience of so young a man, is not a new form), and making them his instrument for the expression of the modern spirit.

It has been noted by social observers that the audiences of Mr Coward's plays are predominatingly young, and in that fact the measure of his achievement is implicit. He has captured the post-War audience for the pleasures of the theatre. He has the wit of his period, which sometimes merely puzzles, sometimes offends the older members of the audience, and also the emotion of his period, so that in, for instance, *The Vortex* the second-act curtain seemed to older people a triumph of dramatic emotion, but to them the last act, which roused the younger spectators to enthusiasm, seemed cold as any stone. He is a phenomenon

of the youth-idolatry of the age, paralleled in fiction by authors who also have enjoyed a world-success before they were thirty. For it is not only to the young playgoer in England that Mr Coward appeals: audiences in Germany and the United States have stayed away from the 'movies' in order to see his plays. Idol of the young, *enfant terrible* to the middle-aged, Noel Coward's career is watched with eagerness or apprehension.

There is some appropriateness and no iconoclasm in mentioning that playwrights before Mr Coward have written when they were very young. Congreve was twenty-three when *The Old Bachelor* was performed, and thirty at the time of his last play, *The Way of the World*. *The Rivals* was performed before Sheridan had reached the age of twenty-four, and his *School for Scandal* when he was only twenty-six.

*Hay Fever* is commonly held to be the best of Mr Coward's comedies. But he wrote *The Young Idea*, a play which, not alone by title, irresistibly picks itself out as his representative work for these pages. It may be interesting to recall that the author played the part of Sholto Brent in America, when he was twenty-one, and afterward in this country.

# ACT I

SCENE: *The scene is the hall of* GEORGE BRENT'S *house in the hunting country. It is well furnished and comfortable. There is a door on the right leading to the drawing-room, a staircase at the back with a turn in it; a little to the left of this there is an opening into a smaller hall and the front door. Farther down left is a curtained window, and on the extreme left a door leading to dining-room.*

*When the curtain rises the stage is empty.*

HUDDLE *enters through hall door, and stands aside to admit* RODDY MASTERS.

HUDDLE. Will you come into the drawing-room, sir?

RODDY. No; I'll wait here.

HUDDLE. Very good, sir.

RODDY [*carelessly*]. Mrs Brent is in?

HUDDLE. Yes, sir. I will tell her you're here. [*Exit* HUDDLE.

[RODDY *crosses down to window and looks out.*

[*Enter* CICELY.

CICELY. Hallo, Roddy!

RODDY [*turning quickly; in eager tones*]. Cicely!

CICELY. Well?

RODDY. Haven't you forgiven me—for last night?

CICELY. Oh, don't be silly.

RODDY. You were awfully cross.

CICELY. Well, it was the sort of 'obviousness' that I particularly dislike.

RODDY [*aggrieved*]. I don't see why. We were all playing the beastly game—the whole house-party. Claud Eccles hid with Priscilla heaps of times.

CICELY. That's not the point—anyhow, she's a silly little fool to let him.

RODDY [*sullenly*]. I'm sure you exaggerate—no one really notices that sort of thing.

CICELY [*suddenly going close to him*]. Roddy—I'm a little frightened—uncomfortable. I don't know why. It may be because I've stayed in all day. I wish I'd hunted, after all.

RODDY. What are you frightened of?

CICELY [*looking away*]. I don't know——

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RODDY [*suddenly taking her in his arms*]. Silly old thing.

CICELY [*breaking away*]. Roddy, you mustn't—George is in the house. Don't you understand he's in the house?

RODDY [*rather nonplussed*]. I thought he was hunting.

CICELY. Well, he isn't; he's in the drawing-room, and he might come out at any minute.

RODDY. It doesn't matter if he does.

CICELY. It matters much more than you think. We've been together much too openly lately, and he's no fool—— I wish I could make you understand.

RODDY. My dear old girl, you mustn't get nervy. George would never suspect anything in a thousand years.

CICELY [*with sarcasm*]. It might afford slight food for suspicion if he came down and found me clasped tightly in your arms—you're never to do it again, not in the house. It's too dangerous.

RODDY. I hardly get you to myself at all.

CICELY. Now, that's not fair of you, Roddy—you know I do my best, but we must not be blatant. You will not understand. If George did by any chance discover—everything—well, he'd do something dreadful: shoot himself or divorce me, or—anyhow, there'd be a terrible scandal.

RODDY. I think you're overrating George's character. He's not nearly strong-minded enough to do anything so dashing as divorce or shooting.

CICELY. I do wish you wouldn't despise my husband so, Roddy. It isn't good form.

RODDY. Damn good form, when it's a question of being in love——

CICELY. With some one else's wife—I see your point.

RODDY. Look here, Cicely, I—I—— Why aren't you a little nicer to me?

CICELY [*drops back*]. I'm perfectly nice, and the nicest part of me is not letting you run down George. I have some sense of duty left.

RODDY. You women are extraordinary creatures—I wonder if you realize what a *grande passion* means?

CICELY. Yes; it means wanting a thing very badly until you've got it.

RODDY. And after you've got it—always—for ever. You sneer at my love for you, and pretend it won't last; but you know in your heart that it's the truest thing that's ever been.

CICELY [*softly*]. Is it, Roddy? Is it, really?

RODDY. My God! Just let me prove it.

[RODDY *takes her in his arms before she has time to resist, and kisses her passionately. As she breaks free from him* GEORGE BRENT *appears at drawing-room door.* CICELY *crosses to table right.*

GEORGE. Hallo, Roddy! Why aren't you hunting to-day?

RODDY [*a little flustered*]. Oh, I don't know—why aren't you?

GEORGE. I'm waiting in to welcome my two children. I suppose you're staying on to tea?

RODDY. Oh, no, thanks. I just dropped in on my way to Dalsham. I'm going to see the new mare Rawlings has there.

GEORGE. Was that the one he was riding on Monday?

RODDY. I don't know. I wasn't out. Anyhow, he's willing to sell, and I'm going to have first refusal.

CICELY. Will you drive me over with you?—I want a little air.

RODDY. Of course I will. Only——

CICELY [*nervously*]. I haven't been out all day; a drive would buck me up.

GEORGE. I rather wanted you to stay in this afternoon, Cicely.

CICELY [*crosses to* GEORGE]. I know—but I can't help it. You can make them both feel at home just as well without me.

GEORGE. They'll think it rather odd. You ought to stay.

CICELY. Well, I can't—I simply can't. I have a headache. Will you bring me back in time for tea, Roddy?

RODDY. Yes.

CICELY. There, George; I'll be back in time for tea.

RODDY. I'll go and start up the car. [*Exit, whistling.*

GEORGE. If it's as necessary as all that, of course there is no more to be said. [CICELY *is about to follow* RODDY.] I want to speak to you for a moment before you go, Cicely.

CICELY [*stops*]. What is it?

GEORGE. I don't wish this affair of yours with Roddy to become public property—you'd better be careful.

CICELY [*astounded*]. George! I—— What do you mean?

GEORGE [*to* CICELY, *quite quietly*]. This is what I mean. You think I'm a weak-minded ass, don't you? Sublimely unconscious of what goes on under my nose? You and Roddy both think that; you and Charlie Templeton thought it also, and Mark Hunter, and Douglas Green. You're awfully silly sometimes, Cicely.

CICELY [*horrified*]. George!—what are you going to do?

GEORGE. I'm not going to do anything, providing you don't make a scandal. This is just a warning.

CICELY. But I——

GEORGE. Now don't be tiresome, Cicely; I don't feel in the mood for a scene.

CICELY. Look here, George, you see, we—we just care for each other, that's all. I'm sorry if I hurt you.

GEORGE. Rubbish! You haven't hurt me a bit.

CICELY [*starts back*]. You mean because you don't love me any more?

GEORGE. Exactly.

CICELY. Then you don't?

GEORGE. Of course not. Why should I? You don't love me. Did you expect me to go on adoring you while you carried on various affairs with the whole county? I think it's simply maddening of you to underrate my intelligence like that—it's one thing Jennifer never did.

CICELY. How dare you talk to me of Jennifer!

GEORGE. Why not? You kiss young men in my hall.

CICELY [*furious*]. To have her children here is bad enough, but for you to hold her up to me as an example! . . .

GEORGE. I never held her up as an example. She was much too irritating to be good for anyone—dear Jennifer.

CICELY. Dear Jennifer, indeed! You didn't say "Dear Jennifer" when you were married to her.

GEORGE. Yes, I did, quite a number of times; but it didn't have the slightest effect—dear Jennifer!

CICELY. I don't attempt to understand you, George. Are you trying to insult me? to drive me to my lover's arms?

GEORGE. I fail to see the point of my driving you, dear, when you trot there so nicely by yourself.

CICELY. I'm going to tell you exactly what I think of you. You're not deceiving me a bit, you know. All this easy banter is only to cover your weakness, your lack of moral courage. You say you know of my affair with Roddy, and yet you won't take any decisive step. You're afraid—afraid, and I despise you for it.

[*Turns away up to stairs.*

GEORGE. It depends what you mean by decisive. If you expect me to hit Roddy over the head with a mallet, I certainly shan't—I like him too much. Of course, apart from women and horses, he's a half-wit, but still, he amuses me.

CICELY. That's right! Facetiousness and pretending not to care will eventually win me back to you—is that the idea? What have you been reading, George?

GEORGE. I am about to disillusion you, Cicely. You think that I am too weak-minded to be firm about anything. True, I'm not firm over many stupid little things that other men would make a fuss about—merely because I don't consider that the end would altogether justify the means. You also feel that I love you still and desire to win you back to me by "pretending not to care"—isn't that how you put it? Well, you're all wrong, absolutely wrong. I don't love you any more, and I should loathe to win you back to me. I can imagine nothing more uncomfortable. I'm quite content to jog along here with you, providing you behave yourself, but if you do anything blatant—and

get talked about—there will be trouble—bad trouble. Now go for your drive, and be back in time for tea. [*Enter* HUDDLE *centre.*

HUDDLE. Mr Masters is in the car, madam—waiting.

CICELY. Tell him that I have decided not to go, after all.

GEORGE. And that we shall expect him back to tea.

HUDDLE. Very good, sir. [*Exit centre.*

CICELY [*after a pause*]. Thank you for being so frank with me, George. It's nice to know just where one stands. Your rudeness has only made me despise you a little more. Please don't expect me to be nice to your children when they arrive. I consider it an insult to me for you to have asked them here at all.

GEORGE. I certainly expect you to be nice to them—I only hope they'll be nice to you. You're sure to be a novelty to them, at any rate. They've spent all their lives on the Continent, among a very haphazard set. It will be interesting for them to come to an English hunting county, where immorality is conducted by rules and regulations.

CICELY. Anyhow, I'm glad we shall have a full house for the next few weeks. There will be more opportunities for me to avoid them.

GEORGE. If you continue in your present sunny mood, dear, I should think they'd be glad as well. [*There is the noise of a motor outside, and then the loud pealing of the bell.*] Here they are, here they are! [*Goes up centre.*

CICELY [*going upstairs*]. I may come down before dinner, and I may not.

GEORGE [*jovially*]. Well, it doesn't matter. Do exactly what you feel like.

CICELY. George, I think you're insufferable! [*Exit, angrily.*

[*There is a moment's pause. Enter* HUDDLE.

HUDDLE [*announcing*]. Miss Gerda and Mr Sholto, sir.

[*Stands aside while they enter, and then withdraws.*

[*Both* GERDA *and* SHOLTO *are beautifully dressed. They come forward together, centre.*

GERDA [*softly and, she hopes, appealingly*]. Please, are you our daddy?

SHOLTO [*with a pronounced break in his voice*]. Father!

[SHOLTO *nudges* GERDA, *who runs forward and flings her arms round* GEORGE'S *neck.* SHOLTO *wrings his hand in a manly fashion.* GEORGE *is entirely dumbfounded.*

GERDA. Oh, Daddy, Daddy, we're so happy, happy—Mother sends you her love, Daddy.

SHOLTO. Oh, Father, you can never guess how we have longed for this moment. We've——

GERDA. Don't break down, big brother.

GEORGE [*placing a hand on each of their heads*]. Little girl—sonny—may I call you sonny?

GERDA [*ecstatically*]. Sholto, he's *got* us! [*Laughing*] I knew he would. You owe me twenty francs.

SHOLTO. Damn! I wanted to go on much longer. I've got that long speech we made up at Boulogne.

GEORGE. Never mind; say it now.

SHOLTO. No, I'll wait until we meet our stepmother. Isn't it amusing having a stepmother and a real mother at the same time?

GERDA. Where is she?

GEORGE. Upstairs, having a headache.

SHOLTO. Was that photograph you sent like her? Mother *was* angry when it came. Wasn't she, Gerda?

GERDA. Absolutely livid. [*They both shriek with laughter.*

SHOLTO. She wanted to tear it up, but we stopped her. We made her keep it on her writing-desk.

GERDA. Now, tell us, were you glad to get Mother's letter? Were you looking forward to welcoming your long-lost darlings? I wanted to come in with a dog, like Peg o' my Heart, but we couldn't find one.

GEORGE. You know, you're both awfully like I thought you'd be.

GERDA. Are we?

SHOLTO. We weren't quite sure about you; we guessed you had a sense of humour, but we thought it would probably be submerged by now—that you'd be more hunty and sporty—you *do* hunt, don't you?

GEORGE. Sometimes four and five days a week.

GERDA. What do you hunt?

SHOLTO. Don't be silly, Gerda. You know perfectly well they hunt foxes and stags and rabbits and things. Oh, by the way, we've got a letter for you from Mother. Give it to him, Gerda.

GERDA. I haven't got it. You have.

SHOLTO. No, I haven't.

GERDA. Yes, you have. I gave it back to you in the car.

SHOLTO. You didn't.

GERDA. I *did*. [*Plunges her hand into his side-pocket and produces letter.*] There!

GEORGE. I wonder if you'd both keep quiet for a moment. Take a look round. [*Sits in settee and commences to read letter.*

[SHOLTO *and* GERDA *wander round the hall, examining things.* SHOLTO *nudges* GERDA, *who looks towards* GEORGE. *She comes to back of settee.*

GERDA [*conversationally*]. Mother was looking awfully pretty when we left. She does her hair *so* nicely now.

GEORGE [*immersed in letter*]. Humph!

SHOLTO. And she's got rather sunburnt—you know, a nice berry colour. She does most of her writing out of doors.

[SHOLTO *looks questioningly at* GERDA, *who nods emphatically.*

*Then he runs out into the smaller hall and returns in a moment with a large cardboard package. Goes to back of settee.*

GERDA. The climate is so lovely in Alassio—all balmy with orange-groves. Mother looks perfectly adorable in an orange-grove.

GEORGE. Does she, indeed?

SHOLTO [*back of settee*]. Yes, she does. Perhaps you'd like to see this? [*Takes large photograph from packet and gives it to* GEORGE.

GEORGE. Thank you.

GERDA [*looking over his shoulder*]. That's Mother—and that's us in the distance, and those are the oranges.

GEORGE [*drily*]. How pretty!

SHOLTO. Yes, isn't it? I always think this is a better portrait.

[*Takes another photograph and hands it to* GEORGE, *who winces slightly, as it is apparently a painfully good likeness.*

GEORGE. By Jove! [*Stares at it.*

[SHOLTO *and* GERDA *nudge one another, and smile.*

SHOLTO. That old seat there is where Mother wrote most of *Secret Lovers*. She used to wear a funny little scarlet overall thing, and Maria used to bring her lunch out to her.

GERDA. It's lovely and cool in the shade of those cypresses. [*Takes another photograph from packet.*] Personally I always *like* this one best—it's so——

[GEORGE *rises hurriedly, dropping the two photographs on to the floor. He seems a little distrait.*

GEORGE. I don't want to see any more now, thanks. We must all go and wash for tea.

SHOLTO [*picking up photographs*]. Well, there's no need to trample Mother underfoot in your excitement.

[*Picks up photos and puts them on settee.*

GERDA. I don't want to go and wash yet—I want to stay here and talk. You know, you'll have to tell us lots of things if we are to be a success with everybody.

GEORGE. If you behave like the modest unassuming young things you are, you couldn't fail to be a success anywhere.

SHOLTO. It's all very fine for you to jeer at us, Father, but if you don't warn us about things we're bound to make mistakes.

GEORGE. There's nothing very much to warn you about, except—except——

GERDA. Well?

GEORGE. Well, if you'll forgive me mentioning it—don't assert yourselves quite so much—be more retiring.

SHOLTO. Of course. Violets won't be in it with us.

GEORGE. I'm afraid you won't have much in common with the others,

so you mustn't mind feeling a bit out of it. You see, conversation in this part of the world is rather apt to run in grooves.

GERDA. That will be good practice. We'll see how long we can talk in one groove.

GEORGE. I think the quieter you keep the better, anyhow, at first. Do you play any games?

SHOLTO. Only poker.

GEORGE. }
GERDA. } Hum, um!
SHOLTO. }

GEORGE [*apprehensively*]. Do you play it well?

GERDA }
SHOLTO } [*together*]. Very well!

GEORGE. I might have known it! [*All laugh.*

GERDA. We also play bridge—just a teeny bit.

GEORGE. Well, don't—while you're here.

SHOLTO. Very well, Father.

GEORGE. And for my sake, will you both try to refrain from doing anything utterly damnable?

GERDA [*wistfully*]. Of course, Daddy, we'll do our best—we wouldn't wound our dear kind daddy for anything in the world, would we, Sholto?

SHOLTO. No, little sister; we will work and slave for him.

GEORGE. All I ask is that you behave yourselves moderately well and try not to grate on every one.

SHOLTO. I think we're going to be very happy here.

GERDA. Did Stepmother Cicely like the idea of our coming?

GEORGE. Well, you see——

SHOLTO. Or did she hate it?

GEORGE. Well, you see——

GERDA. She hated it. What did I tell you, Sholto?

SHOLTO. We shall have to be wistful with her, that's all, and make her love us. You can have a heart-to-heart talk with her, dear, and say how unhappy we are at home, and will she be a second mother to us.

GERDA. No, you'd better talk to her; being the opposite sex, it will probably appeal to her more.

GEORGE. Well, if you take my advice, you won't go on that line at all. Cicely would hate to be even a first mother to anyone, let alone a second.

SHOLTO. Do you think we shall like her?

GEORGE. I'm sure you will.

GERDA. He's lying.

GEORGE. Moments have cropped up during our comparatively short

reunion, Gerda, when only the frailty of your sex has prevented me from striking you.

SHOLTO. Well, after all, it's only natural that she shouldn't want us. She probably thinks we're going to be odious. Won't she be surprised when she sees us?

GEORGE. That remains to be proved.

GERDA. Anyhow, you leave her to us. We'll make her yearn for our company every moment of the day. Is the house full of people?

GEORGE. Yes; they'll be back from hunting pretty soon. [*There is the noise of a motor outside.*] You'd better come and clean yourselves now. Here they are. [*All turn up to centre.*

SHOLTO. Do you always hunt in motor-cars in England?

[*All going towards stairs.*

GEORGE [*as they go upstairs*]. No, my uninitiated lunatic; they're out with the Cragmore to-day.

SHOLTO. Well, I only asked.

[*They are just at the top of the stairs when* GERDA *stops.*

GERDA. Oh, I've left my bag! Get it for me, Sholto, there's a lamb.

[*Winks heavily, unperceived by* GEORGE.

SHOLTO. All right. [*Runs back downstairs.*

[GEORGE *and* GERDA *go off, talking.*

[SHOLTO *quickly takes the two largest photographs from the packet, stands them up on the mantelpiece, shoves packet under chair, then takes* GERDA's *bag and exits upstairs, two at a time.*

[HUDDLE *throws open door.*

[*Enter* PRISCILLA HARTLEBERRY *and* SIBYL BLAITH, *followed by* CLAUD ECCLES. *All three are in hunting kit.*

[HUDDLE *goes off left.*

SIBYL. Are you going to change now, or have tea first?

PRISCILLA. Oh, tea. I couldn't drag myself up those stairs without it. [*Lapsing into baby-talk*] I'se dreffully tired. [*Sits on settee.*

CLAUD. Damned good day, though, taken all round.

SIBYL. I should have liked it better if we hadn't been taken all round. I'm worn out. [*Looking at watch*] It's late, too.

[HUDDLE *enters left with teapot and milk-jug; puts them on table. Exits.*

PRISCILLA. Do you want any, Sibyl?

SIBYL. Not now; I'm too muddy to enjoy it. I'll be down soon.

[*Exit upstairs.*

CLAUD [*crosses to table*]. I shall have a whisky-and-soda.

[*Helps himself.*

PRISCILLA. I must drink tea all by my little self, then.

[*Pours out a cup and helps herself to a sandwich.*

CLAUD [*catches sight of photographs on mantelpiece*]. Hallo! who's this? [*Goes to mantelpiece.*

PRISCILLA [*vacantly*]. Who's what?

CLAUD. These photos. Some friend of Cicely's, I suppose. [*Picks up photos, shows them to* PRISCILLA.

PRISCILLA. Who can it be, now? It isn't Gracie Fancourt; I know her by sight. I've never noticed it before, have you?

CLAUD. No.

PRISCILLA. Oh, well, we'll ask Cicely when she comes down. [CLAUD *replaces photographs.*] Oh, dear! how I adore nice hot tea. I wonder if they drink it much in Poona.

CLAUD [*sits on club fender*]. I wish you weren't going to Poona at all.

PRISCILLA. But think what poor Maurice would say if I didn't. He's waiting out there, counting the weeks until I come—poor lonely darling. Still, I shall hate leaving England and—and—everybody!

[*Casts an arch look at* CLAUD, *who doesn't notice, as he is gazing gloomily into the fire.*

CLAUD. I wonder if you will—really.

PRISCILLA [*reproachfully, taking another sandwich*]. You *know* I will. . . . 'Ickle Prissy'll often feel very homesick out there among nasty, creepy, crawly insects and snakes and things.

CLAUD [*with some bitterness*]. You'll have Maurice.

PRISCILLA. Only in the evenings; he'll be out all day.

CLAUD. Perhaps you'll have time, then, to write to me occasionally?

PRISCILLA. Would you like me to very much?

CLAUD. Yes. More than anything else in the world.

[*Goes and sits by* PRISCILLA *on settee.*

PRISCILLA [*overcome*]. Oh, Claud! [*Takes another sandwich.*

CLAUD. When you've gone I don't quite know what I shall do. We've been together a lot lately, haven't we?

PRISCILLA. Do you think people have noticed?

CLAUD. Oh, no. I shouldn't be such a cad as to get you talked about.

PRISCILLA [*with obvious relief*]. I know you wouldn't, Claud. 'Ickle Prissy has a very soft corner in her heart for you.

CLAUD. You'll dance with me as much as you can at the Hunt Ball next week, won't you? It'll be your last night down here.

PRISCILLA. Of course I will. I love dancing with you; our steps go so well together.

CLAUD. If only you weren't tied down, our steps might have gone together through life.

PRISCILLA [*with gentle reproach*]. You mustn't talk to me like that, else I'll be cross wiv you.

CLAUD. I simply must say what I really feel, for once. I can't keep it back; I——

PRISCILLA [*hurriedly*]. Claud!—think of Maurice.

[*Quickly takes another sandwich, presumably to calm herself.*

[*Enter* JULIA CRAGWORTHY, *followed by* EUSTACE. JULIA *is in riding-habit;* EUSTACE *is not.*

JULIA. If you hadn't insisted on staying behind to jaw to Lady Churchington, Eustace, we should have been saved the hideous boredom of having to drive with the Crossleys.

EUSTACE. I had to stop, because she was a great friend of my aunt's; also she is twice removed from the Cheshire Churchingtons.

JULIA. She'll be removed from Leicestershire soon if she rides her horses to death like that. Every one was talking about it. Tea, for the love of heaven! [*Gets tea from table.*

EUSTACE. Have the young prodigals arrived yet?

CLAUD. Which young prodigals?

EUSTACE. George's children. They're due to-day.

JULIA. So they are. I'd forgotten all about them. I expect Cicely's in a flaming temper. Poor Cicely! she has no repose in a crisis.

PRISCILLA. Why should it be a crisis?

JULIA. It must be a crisis to any second wife to have the first wife's offspring suddenly foisted upon her. No, thanks, Claud. [CLAUD *has worked up and round to back of settee with cakes, which he offers to* JULIA.] Plain bread-and-butter.

EUSTACE. I think it was in doubtful taste for Jennifer to send them.

PRISCILLA. You knew her, didn't you?

EUSTACE. Oh, yes, years ago.

CLAUD. What was she like?

EUSTACE. Very tiresome, very tiresome indeed—she and George used to jar on one another terribly. I shall never forget—— By Jove!

[*Suddenly catches sight of photographs; crosses to fireplace.*

PRISCILLA. What is it? [JULIA *moves to back of settee.*

EUSTACE [*examining them closely*]. This is Jennifer—very like she used to be—very like. A bit *passée*, of course, since I saw her—been knocking about too much. Damn fool ever to have left George.

PRISCILLA. Did she leave him? I thought it was the other way round.

EUSTACE. As a matter of fact, they arranged it between them; said they were too temperamental, or some such rubbish.

[*Takes cup of tea and sits on club fender.*

JULIA. I know the sort of thing. I only hope history won't repeat itself——

PRISCILLA. What do you mean, Mrs Cragworthy?

JULIA. Well, I'm a plain woman, and I generally have the moral courage to speak out——

EUSTACE. You mean Cicely and——

JULIA. Roddy. Precisely.

PRISCILLA. But that wouldn't be history repeating itself exactly, would it? I mean, Jennifer didn't care for anyone else—I mean——

[*Re-enter* CICELY, *downstairs.*

CICELY. So sorry, all of you. I've had a beastly headache all the afternoon. Had a good day, Julia?

JULIA. Top-hole. Collins was out on that knock-kneed old chestnut. He told me all about the Hinton girls and Roger Gray. I've never laughed so much in my life.

PRISCILLA. Nora Brand was out too, and Nicky and Boy Fenton. I saw them all glaring at one another.

CICELY. Some people are amazing, aren't they? [*She sees photographs.*] Who put those there?

EUSTACE. I don't know. Didn't you?

CICELY [*looking at them hard*]. But—but—why, it's Jennifer! Really, I—— [*Crosses to mantelpiece and back to centre.*

EUSTACE. Yes, it is Jennifer. Hasn't changed much, considering. I remember her—let me see now——

CICELY. Sometimes George goes a little too far. I must ask him to take them down; they crowd up the mantelpiece so.

EUSTACE. Where are the two children, Cicely? Do they fall below or come up to your expectations?

CICELY. I haven't seen them yet. My head was too bad for me to come down when they arrived. George has carried them off somewhere. To be perfectly frank, I'm rather dreading them.

EUSTACE. One instinctively mistrusts the idea of young people bred on the Continent—instinctively. I don't wish to depress you, Cicely, but they're certain to be precocious.

PRISCILLA. How old are they?

CICELY. The boy's twenty-one, and the girl's eighteen.

JULIA. Where were they at school?

CICELY. I don't know. They've been mostly educated at home, I think.

JULIA. I thought as much. They'll know all the things they ought not to know.

CICELY. Perhaps you'd like to take them in hand, Julia dear. I feel sure you could be sufficiently firm.

JULIA. I can bear anything except artificiality. As long as they are natural, and don't try to push themselves forward and monopolize the conversation——

CLAUD. Here they are.

[*Re-enter* GEORGE *downstairs, followed by* GERDA *and* SHOLTO.

GEORGE [*to* CICELY]. Cicely—this is Gerda and Sholto.

[GERDA *and* SHOLTO *go to centre and walk down*

CICELY [*rises*]. How do you do?

GERDA [*crosses to* CICELY, *firmly kissing her on both cheeks*]. Please, are you our new mummy? [*Falls back.*

SHOLTO [*crosses to* CICELY; *with simple manliness*]. We have waited a long time for this moment. [*Takes her hand.*

CICELY [*staggered*]. Oh—er—have you?

SHOLTO. Yes, indeed we have. Gerda said to me in the train—didn't you, Gerda?

GERDA. I did.

SHOLTO. "Sholto," she said, "aren't you simply pining to see our Stepmother Cicely?" "Yes, Gerda," I said. Didn't I, Gerda?

GERDA. You did.

SHOLTO. "Yes, Gerda; she looked so charming in the picture Father sent."

CICELY [*looking at* GEORGE]. What picture?

GEORGE [*airily*]. I just sent Jennifer one of your new ones. I thought you wouldn't mind.

CICELY. You sent Jennifer one of my new photographs?

GEORGE. Yes.

CICELY [*coldly*]. Why?

GEORGE [*feebly*]. Because I thought she'd like it.

GERDA [*conciliatively*]. She did, too. Didn't she, Sholto?

SHOLTO [*with slightly overdone enthusiasm*]. She adored it!

CICELY [*angrily to* GEORGE]. I fail to see that there was the slightest necessity—— Well, never mind now. Julia, these are George's children. Mrs Cragworthy, Mrs Hartleberry, Eustace Dabbitt, and Claud Eccles.

SHOLTO. } How do you do?
GERDA. }

EUSTACE. I'm an old friend of your mother's. [*Shakes hands.*

SHOLTO [*politely*]. Are you?

GERDA. Of course—yes! Don't you remember, Sholto, Mother said, the very last thing before we started, "Give my very best love to dear old Claud Eccles; he's certain to be there."

EUSTACE. My name is Dabbit.

GERDA. Of course! How stupid of me—I mean Dabbit.

SHOLTO. It's no use, Gerda; you've floundered badly. [*To* EUSTACE] I'm so sorry; my sister was only trying to be pleasant.

EUSTACE. I remember your mother—let me see, now—we were staying with Lady Dutton—or was it the Fenworths?—the Shropshire Fenworths, you know—not the Leicester ones.

SHOLTO [*relieved*]. Oh, I *am* glad it wasn't the Leicester ones! I've heard such fearful things about them.

JULIA. Indeed! My aunt is a Leicester Fenworth.

GERDA. Forgive my brother; he was only trying to be funny.

SHOLTO [*holding* GERDA's *hand; both cross to* CICELY]. We're frightfully excited, you know. It's the first time we've been in England, anyhow since we were tiny. So don't be cross if we're stupid about things. You see, living on the Continent, as we have——

GERDA [*interrupting*]. It's all, naturally, new and thrilling to us here. You can't imagine how funny it is, everything being grey instead of brightly coloured, and every one talking English, and not waving their arms much and——

SHOLTO. Gerda, we're talking too much. Remember what Father said.

GERDA [*cheerfully*]. Sorry, everybody!

GEORGE. Do you want any tea?

GERDA. Yes, please.

PRISCILLA. I'll do it, Cicely. You sit still and rest that poor tired head of yours.

GEORGE. Is it still bad, dear?

CICELY [*snappily*]. Yes, it is.

GEORGE. It's a pity you didn't go for the drive with Roddy, after all; it might have done you good. [*He suddenly sees photographs.*] Hallo! Why? Oh, Lord! [*He bursts out laughing, and looks at* SHOLTO *and* GERDA, *who laugh too. Every one else looks surprised, except* CICELY, *who is furious.*] You little beasts! Go and take them down at once.

SHOLTO [*going to mantelpiece*]. Of course. I always think photographs look untidy without frames.

CICELY [*with a forced smile*]. Give them to me. I'll tell Huddle to send them down to the village to be done.

SHOLTO [*handing them to her*]. I think black would be nicer than anything else, don't you? Just plain and narrow——

GERDA [*looking over* CICELY's *shoulder*]. Or perhaps brown wood——

CICELY [*scrutinizing them with a smile*]. So that's your mother? She's quite different from what I imagined. What a quaint dress! Is that typically Italian?

GERDA. No; only an overall. She always wears them during the day—so cool and comfy——

CICELY [*still smiling*]. Very pretty.

SHOLTO [*rises, goes to tea-table*]. I think it's Mother that's pretty; not the overall.

CICELY. Remind me about those, somebody. [*Puts them on table.*

CLAUD. Right-o!

CICELY. Was Bobby Armstrong out to-day?

PRISCILLA. Yes. I knew he would be. Beryl followed in a dog-cart.

EUSTACE. She's got no go in her, that girl. She borrowed the top of my thermos, and never returned it. Shallow, very shallow.

JULIA. How she has the nerve to come to meets at all, after what happened at the Cragmore Ball, beats me.

CICELY. I knew she'd try to brazen it out.

JULIA. Bobbie behaved pretty well over the whole affair. Damn good value, Bobbie.

EUSTACE. Best stables in the Monday country.

JULIA. He sold Frank Forbes a ripping good filly last winter; never turned her head. [*Enter* RODDY *by front door.*

GEORGE. Hallo, Roddy. You *have* been quick.

RODDY. I didn't get to Dalsham after all; I've had some rather bad news.

CICELY. Bad news? What is it?

RODDY. My brother out in Jamaica is dead—I've had a cable—I've been more or less expecting it. It means I shall have to go out there at once, within the next fortnight.

CICELY [*gives a little cry*]. Oh! [*Controls herself.*] How very tiresome for you, Roddy! I *am* so sorry.

GEORGE. So am I, Roddy.

PRISCILLA. Will you have to stay out there?

RODDY. Yes. You see, I'm his only living relative. I shall have to take over control of his plantation—at least for a few months, until all his affairs are settled.

GEORGE. We shall miss you, Roddy—shan't we, Cicely?

CICELY. Yes—of course we shall.

PRISCILLA. Won't you be here for the Hunt Ball, after all?

RODDY. I don't know; it all depends—it's next Tuesday, isn't it? I shouldn't think I'd be able to get away before then.

GEORGE. By the way, Roddy, let me introduce my son and daughter. [SHOLTO *and* GERDA *get up and shake hands.*

SHOLTO [*crossing to* RODDY; *sympathetically*]. How do you do? Jolly rotten for you. You say he was your only brother? [*Shakes his hand.*

GERDA [*shakes his hand*]. You'll have to cheer up and try not to think about it.

RODDY. It is such a beastly long journey. [*Sits down again.*

GERDA. I meant about him dying.

SHOLTO. So did I.

RODDY [*hurriedly*]. Well, you see, I haven't set eyes on him for about eight years.

GEORGE. Look here, I must just go and write a note to your mother, to thank her for you. You'd better both wait here.

SHOLTO } [*wistfully*]. Very well, Father.
GERDA }

[SHOLTO *chokes into his teacup.* GERDA *bangs him on the back. Every one else goes on talking. Exit* GEORGE *right.*

CICELY. Does anybody want to play bridge?—Julia?

JULIA. I will when I've changed. [*Crosses towards stairs.*

CICELY. Eustace, I know you will—Roddy, do you feel like it?

RODDY. Yes—all right.

JULIA [*going upstairs*]. I shan't be five minutes. [*Exit.*

CICELY [*to* SHOLTO *and* GERDA]. Do you want to play?

GERDA. I think we'd better not.

SHOLTO. You haven't such a thing as a ludo-board in the house?

CICELY. Priscilla?

PRISCILLA. No. I'm going to write a long, long letter to Maurice before dinner. [*Rises and moves towards stairs.*

[CLAUD *follows. They pause up centre.*

CICELY. Come on, Eustace; Claud, you can cut in later if you like. I shan't play for long.

CLAUD. Thanks awfully. [*Exeunt* CICELY, EUSTACE, *and* RODDY *right.*

GERDA [*conversationally*]. Have you been hunting all day?

CLAUD. Yes.

SHOLTO. Did you find anything?

PRISCILLA [*giggling*]. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!—that's very funny! Oh, dear!

SHOLTO. It wasn't meant to be. I was only taking an intelligent interest.

GERDA. Not intelligent, dear.

SHOLTO. Now, don't be superior, Gerda. You really know just as little about it as I do. [*To* CLAUD] You see, we want to pick up all we can about hunting. So that we can get along all right in the groove.

CLAUD. The what?

GERDA. The groove, the hunting groove. You don't talk about much else down here, do you? You see, we're used to people who talk about everything—vice and art and food—and, of course, we don't want to be out of the swim——

SHOLTO. So will you tell us things?

PRISCILLA. I'm afraid I haven't time just now.

[*Enter* HUDDLE *to clear tea-things.*

CLAUD. You'll learn soon enough. Are you coming up now, Priscilla? [*Starts to go upstairs.*

PRISCILLA [*following him*]. Yes. If I don't catch this mail poor Maurice will think his 'ickle Prissy dreffly neglectful—poor darling.

[*Exeunt* PRISCILLA *and* CLAUD, *talking.*

GERDA. They don't seem to want to talk to us very much, do they?

SHOLTO. Silly asses!

GERDA [*to* HUDDLE, *still out to be pleasant*]. What's your name?

HUDDLE. Huddle, miss.

SHOLTO. Have you been here long?

HUDDLE. Three years, sir.

GERDA. Do you like it?

HUDDLE. Yes, thank you, miss. [*Exit with tray.*

[*There is a slight pause.*

GERDA [*furiously*]. Sholto—I hate them! I hate them all, except Daddy. They're beasts—and that cat Cicely was trying to be horrible about Mother. They're all against us just because we're not narrow and horsey, like them. I want to go back home now—I want Mother! [*She sniffs.*

SHOLTO. Now don't give way and be absurd. Remember we have a mission in life. May the light of it guide you to a calmer state of mind—it's a very beautiful mission.

GERDA. I'm quite calm, really. But if you ever inherit this house, you can live in it by yourself—it's perfectly beastly.

SHOLTO. One thing cheers me up intensely.

GERDA. What is it?

SHOLTO [*complacently*]. The look Cicely gave when Roddy What's-his-name said he had to go away.

GERDA. You mean that she's——?

SHOLTO [*smiling*]. I think we're going to be very happy here!

## ACT II

### SCENE I

SCENE: *The same as Act I.*

TIME: *A week has elapsed.*

*When the curtain rises* CICELY, JULIA, SIBYL, PRISCILLA, *and* GERDA *are seated about, having after-dinner coffee. They are all, with the exception of* GERDA, *shrieking with laughter. Their clothes are conventional, pinks and blues, not too well made.* GERDA *is in a 'chic' and elaborately simple frock.*

SIBYL. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!—it really was awfully funny, wasn't it?

PRISCILLA. I've never laughed so much in my life.

[*Enter* CLAUD, GEORGE, EUSTACE, *and* SHOLTO *from dining-room.*

GEORGE. What are you all laughing at?

JULIA. Only the story of Bessie Clifton and Jack Mostyn.

[SHOLTO *sits on club fender.* PRISCILLA *crosses to* CLAUD, *centre.*

EUSTACE. Most amusing, most amusing. I always said to Bessie that the only thing more expensive than hunting was virtue!

PRISCILLA. By the way, Cicely, is Roddy going away to-morrow for certain?

CICELY. Yes, I think so.

JULIA. I've always liked Roddy, in spite of what people say about him and the Clifton girl. I'm sure it's not true.

CICELY. I *know* it isn't.

GERDA [*sweetly*]. But still, he *has* rather the reputation of a Don Juan in the county, hasn't he, Stepmother Cicely?

GEORGE. We all have reputations and traditions in the county, Gerda. Some of us try to live up to them, and others hope to live them down. Roddy is one of the latter.

SIBYL. Anyhow, we shall miss him.

EUSTACE. His uncle is one of the Monmouthshire Masters, I think. Very old family.

GERDA. I should love to be going to Jamaica. Wouldn't you, Stepmother Cicely?

CICELY. Not particularly.

SIBYL. I wonder if he'll get much good riding out there. He'll be wretched if he doesn't.

CLAUD. Wonderful seat on a horse—old Roddy.

GERDA. That's the expression we were trying to think of, to tell Mother. "Wonderful seat on a horse."

GEORGE. You're learning a lot, aren't you?

SHOLTO [*rises, crosses to settee*]. Rather! A man in a red coat and a black velvet cap, with a lot of dogs, is called an M.F.H.

GERDA. Not dogs, dear—hounds!

SHOLTO. Sorry! Hounds.

CICELY. I really don't see the point of your trying to master hunting technicalities. You're surely not intending to take it up seriously?

SHOLTO. Why not? We're both young, and I'm sure we've got good seats.

CICELY [*contemptuously; looking across to* JULIA]. You really are too absurd!

GERDA [*reminiscently*]. I ride a frightfully fiery donkey at home. Its name is Muriel.

SHOLTO [*in hunting tones*]. Damn good value, old Muriel—never turns her head.

GERDA. She can't, poor dear; she suffers from spavin.

PRISCILLA. But that wouldn't have anything to do with it.

SHOLTO. Believe me, the slightest thing upsets Muriel; she is neurotic.

JULIA [*heavily*]. If you two kids took things a bit more seriously you might learn something.

PRISCILLA. Let's push some of the things back and practise steps for to-night.

CICELY. All right. Go and get the records, will you, Claud? They're in the drawing-room.

GEORGE. Why not dance in there? The floor's ever so much better.

JULIA. Won't it be rather cold?

SIBYL. Oh, no, we shall soon get warm. Come on, everybody; you've got to dance, too, to-night, Mr Dabbit.

EUSTACE. Only a waltz. I can't stand these fox-trot things.

SIBYL. You'll have to hurry up and learn. [EUSTACE *moves towards drawing-room door.*] Is Roddy coming here first, before the ball, Cicely?

CICELY. Yes, I think he is—I really don't know.

[*Exit* SIBYL, GEORGE *following, into drawing-room.*

GEORGE. I hope to goodness he brings his car. We shall never all squash into the Daimler. [*Exit.*

SIBYL. Oh, he's sure to. [*Exeunt* EUSTACE, JULIA *into drawing-room.*

SHOLTO. What time does the ball start?

PRISCILLA. About ten, I think; but it won't be really jolly until after midnight.

GERDA. Will it be really jolly then?

CLAUD. Oh, yes, rather, rather. Last year Donald Hake slid down the stairs on a tray and broke ten empty champagne-bottles—damn good rag!

SHOLTO [*laughing*]. It sounds delightful. I love subtle humour.

GERDA. Don't be supercilious, dear. You know Stepmother Cicely doesn't like it.

CICELY. There's nothing in the least clever in deprecating people to whom you are not accustomed. Donald Hake is a normal, healthy, and amusing boy.

SHOLTO. I'm sorry if I was supercilious, but it *does* sound silly to get drunk in public and make an abject fool of yourself.

CICELY. I'm sure I hope that your own lives have been spotless enough to allow you to criticize others.

GERDA [*hotly*]. Sholto's never been drunk!

SHOLTO. Hush, darling!—that's not a crime; it's normal, healthy, and amusing. [*Fox-trot heard off.*

PRISCILLA [*with* CLAUD, *centre; intelligently*]. Well, I suppose there are different ways of doing different things. Do come and dance, Claud; I want to learn that new cross-over step; it's so much better than the one, two, three, dip.

CLAUD. Right-o. Are you three coming?

[*Exeunt* CLAUD *and* PRISCILLA, *talking.* CICELY *follows. As she passes end of settee, stops centre.*

SHOLTO [*to* CICELY]. You *do* hate us being here, don't you?

CICELY. I'm afraid I haven't given the matter enough thought. You amuse George, and, after all—— [*Shrugs.*

SHOLTO. After all, it is not easy at a moment's notice to become an adoring adopted mother. That is true.

CICELY. I have never had the slightest intention of being your adopted mother.

GERDA [*curiously*]. Why do you loathe us so much? Is it because your husband's our father, or because we laugh at things, or because——

CICELY. I don't see that there is any real necessity to discuss the subject any further, do you? [*Going.*

GERDA. Of course we do. It may be unconventional to talk of anything really openly here, but——

CICELY. I'm afraid you frequently confuse lack of convention with lack of breeding.

SHOLTO. Oho! [*Pause.*] Oh! [*Exit* CICELY *to drawing-room.* [*After a slight pause*] That's a nasty one.

GERDA [*on settee*]. We were asking for it, dear. Still, we had to give her a chance to be nice. Wouldn't it have been awful if she'd got all impulsive, and wept a little and said she wanted us all to be girls together? Thank heaven she really is an unpleasant woman. Now we'd better start in and get busy.

SHOLTO [*on settee*]. And the sooner the better. Do you think the crucial moment will occur to-night?

GERDA. It's certain to; it's Roddy's last night in England. How far have they gone already, I wonder?

SHOLTO. Which of the women here is most intimate with our gentle, loving stepmother? That's the first thing to find out.

GERDA. Well, not Sibyl, anyhow; she hasn't known her long enough.

SHOLTO. There's bounding Julia.

GERDA. No. Bounding Julia's too outspoken and straight-from-the-shoulderish to be really intimate with anyone.

SHOLTO. Priscilla, then; she's the only one left. We'd better try her. Shall I become amorous?

GERDA. No; you might go too far, and spoil everything.

SHOLTO. I don't think one could go too far with Priscilla. She has no distance.

GERDA. No; we'll do it together. We'll be rather wistful and say she is the only one here who really understands us.

SHOLTO. I doubt if she knows anything at all.

GERDA. We'll find out, or die. Go and call her.

SHOLTO. Now?

GERDA. Yes; we ought to discover as much as possible before the ball. You never know what crisis might happen at a ball. Think of Donald Hake!

SHOLTO [*going to drawing-room door*]. Normal, healthy, amusing, and drunk. [*Gramophone fox-trot heard off.*] Pretty dear! [*Crosses to*

*drawing-room door; calls.*] Priscilla! Priscilla! Do be a lamb and come and talk to us. [*Moves back to centre.*

GERDA [*who has followed, takes* SHOLTO'S *hand. In a hoarse whisper*]. Don't look so cheerful! Remember, Mother drinks like a fish, and our life's been hell! [SHOLTO *goes to top of settee, gloomy.*] We must get sympathy at all cost. [*Back to settee, sits.*

PRISCILLA [*off*]. All right—wait a minute. Claud, dance with Sibyl —and Sibyl dance with Claud. That's right. [*She enters.*] All alone! What is it?

GERDA [*hesitatingly*]. Will you—will you—close the door?

PRISCILLA [*closing it, crosses to centre*]. What is it? You make me go all creepy-weepy. Do tell me!

GERDA. It's—it's—— Oh, tell her, Sholto. I can't!

[*She bursts into tears.* SHOLTO *looks rather flummoxed.*

SHOLTO [*lamely*]. Well, you see, we——

PRISCILLA [*crosses to settee; sits*]. Don't cry, Gerda. Tell Prissy all about it.

SHOLTO [*pulling himself together*]. It's this, Priscilla. We—we are both a little unhappy. Don't think me a silly ass and all that, but—but we've failed, failed miserably.

GERDA. And we've come to you because you are the only one who has been really kind, and can understand.

PRISCILLA. How do you mean, you've failed?

SHOLTO. We wanted to make our Stepmother Cicely—well, fond of us, and—oh, I know you think I'm a sentimental fool, [*turns*] but we haven't had much real love in our lives, taken all round, and——

PRISCILLA. But your mother—your own mother? You're always talking about her!

GERDA [*dramatically rises, drops down*]. Words, words, words! [*Blows nose.*] Oh, Priscilla, could you not see beyond? Listen; I'll tell you everything.

SHOLTO. So will I. [*Sits on settee.*

GERDA. Our life, up to now, has been a hell upon earth.

PRISCILLA. What?

GERDA. A bitter hell. Our mother——

SHOLTO [*sorrowfully*]. God forgive her!

GERDA. Our mother has, among many others, one terrible *trait* in her character. She—she—oh, how can I say it!—she drinks like a fish.

SHOLTO. Exactly like a fish. If you only knew how utterly damnable existence has been for us, you'd sympathize.

PRISCILLA [*thrilled*]. But I *do* sympathize. I never realized—I never guessed.

GERDA. Of course not. How could you? But we felt we just

couldn't keep it back any longer. Stepmother Cicely hates us. We've tried—— Ah!

SHOLTO. Ah!

GERDA. How we've tried to make things different between us! But it's no use—she's bitterly prejudiced——

SHOLTO. You see, our mother——

GERDA. God forgive her!

SHOLTO [*chokes, and recovers himself*]. Our mother, when she left poor Father——

PRISCILLA. Left him! But I thought——

SHOLTO. That they mutually agreed to separate? I know. [*He laughs hollowly.*] That's what every one thinks. She ran away with an Italian count——

GERDA. With a long black beard——

SHOLTO. Damn him!

GERDA [*hurriedly*]. And it ruined her life and his life and Daddy's life and our lives and——

PRISCILLA. Oh, you poor darlings! [*Embraces* GERDA.

SHOLTO [*warming to his work*]. Daily we watched our mother sinking—— Ah, *Madonna mia! . . . che disastro!*

[*Gramophone fox-trot heard off.*

PRISCILLA [*anxiously*]. What does that mean?

GERDA. Oh, it's nothing. Sholto always lapses into Italian when he's worked up. But don't you see what we're aiming at? Cicely, our stepmother, is about to do the same fatal thing with Roddy Masters—*you* know—*we* know—and yet we're impotent, impotent!

PRISCILLA. How did you know?

SHOLTO. Oh, that doesn't matter. But you must help us—— Oh! please—— [*Both shake her hands.*] Please say you'll help us!

PRISCILLA. Oh, I will.

SHOLTO. It must be stopped at all costs. It——

PRISCILLA [*ruminatively*]. Of course, people *are* beginning to talk.

[*All cross left. Both pull her round.*

GERDA. But you're intimate with her; she tells you everything. Is she—does she love Roddy as much as our poor mother loved——?

SHOLTO [*with vigour*]. *Dio perdoni la!*

PRISCILLA. Was that his name?

SHOLTO. Yes. Count Dio Perdoni la—curse him!

PRISCILLA. Well, I know Roddy loves Cicely terribly—I've seen some of his letters—frightfully passionate they were. But whether she really loves him——

GERDA. Ah! that's the whole point.

PRISCILLA. Do you think George ought to be told?

SHOLTO. No, no, no! [*Start apart.*] Not until it's absolutely neces-

sary. All you want to do is to understand and watch with us. For instance, tell us to-night if you see them leaving the ballroom together.

GERDA. Do you think she loves him enough to—to——?

PRISCILLA. I know she's very fond of him.

GERDA. How fond?

SHOLTO. Sshh! Look out! [*Enter* CLAUD. *All break away.*

CLAUD. I say, Priscilla, do come and dance.

SHOLTO [*with great display of presence of mind*]. Don't forget, now, Priscilla—third fox-trot after we get there.

PRISCILLA [*nodding mysteriously*]. I won't forget. [*Crosses to* CLAUD.

CLAUD [*suspiciously*]. Are you three up to some rag, or something?

PRISCILLA. No, Claud; Gerda and Sholto were rather worried, and wanted to ask my advice, that was all.

CLAUD. What about?

SHOLTO. The political crisis in Bulgaria.

CLAUD. But there isn't one.

SHOLTO. Nonsense! There's always a political crisis in Bulgaria, the same as there's always haggis in Scotland. It's traditional.

CLAUD. I say, you know, you are talking rot——

PRISCILLA. Come along and dance again, Claud. [*Going*] You're too curious. Come to my room to-night, before you go to bed, Gerda dear—we'll talk about—you know what! [*Exit, soused in mystery.*

CLAUD. There seems to be a lot of secrecy going on about something.

GERDA. } Hush! [CLAUD *follows* PRISCILLA *into drawing-room.*
SHOLTO. }

GERDA [*sits on settee*]. I don't believe she knows very much more than we do.

SHOLTO. Never mind; we've got her on our side. She'll tell us at once if she *does* hear anything.

GERDA. Anyhow, I think Cicely's affair with Roddy is a little more serious than we thought.

SHOLTO. I hope to heaven it is.

GERDA. Yes, but the worst of it is, Cicely won't do anything decisive unless we force her hand.

SHOLTO. We're no use there. Father is the only one who would have the slightest effect. If he could only be particularly irritating to her, to-night of all nights, everything would be all right.

GERDA. Couldn't we make him?

SHOLTO. Yes, but how?

GERDA [*thoughtfully*]. Sweet memories that bless and burn are always useful. We must have a heart-to-heart talk with him. You see, it isn't a question of Cicely not caring for him any more; she frankly hates him.

SHOLTO. She's too silly to appreciate him.

GERDA. Exactly; but it makes things easier for us. Daddy loves Mother best, and always has, at heart—we know that. The question is——

SHOLTO. How to reunite the two bleeding souls. Oh, for heaven's sake, let's concentrate! Think—think—think! [*Clutches his head.*

[*Enter* GEORGE *from drawing-room.*

GEORGE. What's the matter, Sholto? Got a headache?

GERDA. No; he's only feeling a bit homesick, that's all. We often get waves of it—don't we, dear?

SHOLTO. Rather. It's damnable being away from Mother for long. You see, we're so used to having her there always—to laugh with us.

GERDA. There's no one in the world with a sense of humour like Mother. No wonder you married her.

SHOLTO. What was she like then, Father?

GEORGE. Judging from your frequent descriptions, very like she is now.

GERDA. She told us all about the wedding and the honeymoon in the Channel Islands.

SHOLTO. And you took so much seasick cure that you were drugged into a state of coma for three days.

GERDA. So tiresome for any young bride.

GEORGE. Yes, but it didn't matter. Nothing mattered—we were gloriously happy. Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, and Sark—they are magic names, aren't they?

SHOLTO. They're magic places, especially Sark.

GEORGE. Have you been there?

SHOLTO. Of course. We go nearly every year.—Mother always insists.

GEORGE. Does she, by Jove!

GERDA. Yes; she's really a mass of sentiment, in spite of her literary cynicism. She likes old workboxes, and places where she lived when she was a girl; and, best of all—Sark.

SHOLTO. She makes us sit on the jetty of Creux harbour and watch the passengers land from the Guernsey boat, and when she sees a young man and woman together, she sniffs a little and says: "That might be dear George and me. Aren't memories painful, darlings?"

GERDA. She always calls us darlings, even when she's lived with us. Habit, I suppose.

GEORGE [*far away*]. Yes, she had lots of quaint habits.

GERDA. Why did you ever stop loving her?

GEORGE. Didn't she tell you about that too?

SHOLTO. No; she only remembers pleasant things.

GEORGE. Well, so do I, so we won't discuss it.

GERDA. You've never been very good at facing facts, have you, Daddy?

GEORGE. How do you mean?

SHOLTO. If only you and Mother hadn't shirked in the first place we should all be together now, instead of being parted by the English Channel and the divorce courts.

GEORGE. In what way shirked?

GERDA. Well, you both thought yourselves too clever, and used temperament as an excuse for your rows. If only you'd faced the fact that it was pure selfishness and intolerance from beginning to end—all this trouble would have been saved.

GEORGE [*unexpectedly*]. You mean the trouble you two are taking in order to reconcile your mother and myself—against our wills?

SHOLTO. He's got us again, dear. We must be more subtle.

[*The music stops.*

GERDA [*gently*]. If we really thought that it was against your wills, we should never attempt it.

SHOLTO. As it is, we mean to strain every nerve.

GEORGE. Then you declare war on the peace of my country life—you intend to uproot me, regardless of any such trifling bonds as honour and good name!

GERDA [*firmly*]. Yes, we do.

GEORGE. And you think it possible, supposing all obstacles were swept away and you accomplished this, that your mother and I should be happy together?

SHOLTO [*with equal firmness*]. Yes, we do.

GEORGE [*defiantly*]. Well, let me tell you you're wrong, thoroughly wrong. You're astute, precocious young devils, but you've made one grave mistake. You think that I'm still in love with your mother—well, I'm not. I don't love anyone. I'm content and peaceful here, my life is perfectly happy, I have a certain amount of responsibility, but not too much; I hunt and shoot and read and eat and sleep—and I'm getting too old to require anything more. [*Takes their hands.*] I agreed that you should come here, not because of any sentimental desire to see you, but because Sholto is to be my heir; it is right that he should get some idea of his future position in life. You and your mother mean nothing to me—nothing! And, apart from a certain amount of superficial amusement, I shouldn't mind if I never set eyes on you again. Your conceit is colossal to imagine that I should be willing to leave this life to which I have grown so accustomed, and join you in yours—even if it were possible. But, thank God, it isn't possible—it isn't possible. I'm entrenched here, and here I mean to stay. Please never let me hear the subject mentioned again.

GERDA [*after a slight pause*]. What a wonderful liar you are, Daddy!

SHOLTO. You don't suppose we believe a word of all that nonsense?

GEORGE. I allow you a certain amount of licence, but I will not stand rudeness.

GERDA [*following* GEORGE]. It's no use blustering, Daddy; it won't have the slightest effect—you see, we know the truth. Why not give in—gracefully? You'll have to, in the end.

GEORGE [*suddenly serious*]. I can't give in—you don't understand. I'm not like you, without any moral sense at all—I wish to God I were. I've blundered badly in life, and I've got to put up with the consequences. People don't get second chances of happiness in this world; they're lucky if they get even a first chance. Well, I've had that, and I chucked it away when I agreed to let your mother divorce me. Then, in order to tie me down still more, Fate ordained that I should be left this house and estate—I had to have some one to run it with me—I wrote to Jennifer, asking her to patch everything up and come back; but she wouldn't. She was always as obstinate as a mule.

GERDA. Yes, but a *nice* mule.

GEORGE. Then Cicely appeared. Cicely was quite adorable once, and radiantly pretty——

SHOLTO. Prettier than Mother?

GEORGE. Much. Then I married her and started the business of settling down. I religiously forgot Jennifer for almost two years; then Cicely began getting tiresome and having affairs with stupid young men, and—Jennifer's memory came back and taunted me and laughed at me. It's been doing that for nearly fourteen years now.

GERDA. And you're going to let it continue for fourteen years more?

GEORGE. Oh, no; it will probably die a natural death before then.

SHOLTO [*pensively*]. It must be awful to have a conscience.

GEORGE. It is.

GERDA [*softly*]. It would be such fun—all going back together.

[*Goes to and takes* GEORGE *by hands.*

GEORGE [*holding up his hand*]. Now, then! [*Rises.*

GERDA. But it would. Think of the thrill of it!

SHOLTO. We'd stop in Paris for a day or two——

GERDA. Just to do a little shopping, and go to some plays——

SHOLTO. Then the Orient Express! [*One on either side of* GEORGE.

GERDA [*excitedly*]. The Orient Express! We get into it at about seven-thirty, and have dinner as we whizz through the suburbs——

SHOLTO. Then we come back and find our *wagon-lits* have been made up, so we sit in rather strained positions and play games——

GERDA. Clumps, and Being People in History! Lovely!

SHOLTO. You have to wake up for a minute in the middle of the night, because of the Swiss customs——

GERDA. Then in the morning—the very early morning—you peep

out, and it's all mountains and valleys and rushing torrents and white. white snow as far as you can see——

GEORGE [*carried away*]. Yes—yes—wonderful!

SHOLTO. Then the Simplon Tunnel, and Italy—Italy——

GERDA. We pass Lake Maggiore on the left-hand side—glorious clear blue water and mountains going straight out of it——

SHOLTO. And villas dotted over the hills like pink sweets in a green cake.

GEORGE. Shut up, both of you! I've seen it—I know it——

SHOLTO. Then Milan. We change at Milan.

GERDA. And there's two hours to wait, so we can drive about the town——

SHOLTO. In the gorgeous hot sun!

GERDA. We can send a wire to Mother from there to tell her what time to expect us——

SHOLTO. She'll be so excited——

GEORGE. Stop!!—Stop!! I tell you. [*Both follow* GEORGE, *left.*

GERDA. Oh, Daddy darling, why not chuck all the honour and English gentleman stunts and come with us? It's worth trying.

SHOLTO. You've been divorced once; it's sure to be much easier a second time.

GEORGE. It's no use—I shouldn't be happy—I've got to stick to my guns. I told Cicely on the day you came that, providing she behaved herself and didn't allow things to become blatant—[*Enter* PRISCILLA *and* SIBYL *from drawing-room*] I would say nothing. I——

SIBYL. We're just going upstairs to tidy ourselves; Cicely says we'll have to be starting soon. [*They go upstairs.*

SHOLTO [*brightly*]. Roddy isn't here yet—surely we shan't start without him?

PRISCILLA [*from landing*]. Oh, he won't be long now. Anyhow, we must powder our noses. [*Exeunt both, upstairs.*

[GEORGE *goes and sits on fender.*

GERDA. Quick, Daddy! You've got to make up your mind. We'll help you in everything.

GEORGE [*quietly*]. I have made up my mind. I'm going to stick to Cicely as long as she sticks to me—I must. It's not melodramatic self-sacrifice, it's just playing the game—though you may not see it in that light, it's true nevertheless.

SHOLTO. Very well, then; if you intend to be as pig-headed as that, we shall have to be firm with you.

GERDA. And manage things in our own way. [*Enter* CICELY.

GEORGE [*alarmed*]. Look here, what do you mean? I absolutely forbid you——

GERDA. It's no use trying to forbid us, Daddy darling; we're quite determined.

CICELY. George!

GERDA. Come, Sholto.

SHOLTO. All right. [*Exeunt* SHOLTO *and* GERDA *upstairs.*

CICELY. I should be very much obliged, George, if you would ask your charming son and daughter to be a little more polite to me. They have been particularly rude this evening.

GEORGE [*half laughing*]. I notice that they both leave the room the moment you enter it.

CICELY. They're intolerable.

GEORGE. Why are you always so prickly?—like a cactus-hedge.

CICELY. I can see nothing amusing in calling your wife a cactus-hedge. Having placed me in an insufferable position, you——

GEORGE. If you're alluding to matrimony, dear, it's a trouble many better women have had to face.

CICELY. I don't think flippancy suits you.

GEORGE. Jennifer used to love me to be flippant.

CICELY. Need we talk about Jennifer?—is it quite good taste?

GEORGE. I only mentioned her in passing—she is now nothing but a memory.

CICELY. It's a pity you can't forget her.

GEORGE. The moment one forgets a memory it ceases to be a memory. I shall remember her always——

CICELY. I'm going upstairs. However charming Jennifer was in the flesh, as a topic of conversation she bores me. [*She goes towards stairs.*

GEORGE. Don't go upstairs, Cicely. I'm sorry—honestly I am. I didn't mean to be irritating, but you were rather beastly about Sholto and Gerda, and that made me temporarily lose sight of my objective.

CICELY [*coming to* GEORGE]. What objective?

GEORGE. Oh, Cicely! [*Pause.*] Time was when we used to crouch together over the crackling logs and gaze on life in perfect unison. Let's try to get back.

CICELY. What on earth are you talking about?

GEORGE. I don't quite know. There are moments when I really want to be sincere, and then all my facetiousness crops up and prevents me. I want to be sincere now; the crackling logs and gazing on life was all nonsense. What I really mean is this: let's stop being bitter and horrid to one another; it doesn't lead anywhere.

CICELY. Are you trying to apologize to me, George?

GEORGE. No, dear, but I will if you like. What shall I apologize for?

CICELY [*bitterly*]. There are so many things.

GEORGE [*with a faint smile*]. Oh, won't you meet me half-way, Cicely?

CICELY [*flaring up*]. Why should I meet you half-way? You don't seem to realize that you've made me the laughing-stock of the county.

GEORGE. Nonsense!

CICELY. It isn't nonsense. What other woman would stand it? Those affected, artificial children of yours, always sniggering in corners and making inane remarks—they haven't attempted to learn anything about the life down here; they just laugh and giggle and talk about their mother. [*Sits on settee.*

GEORGE [*hotly*]. If you were nicer to them they wouldn't talk about their mother; you've ignored them and tried to snub them ever since they arrived. Isn't that rather asking for trouble?

CICELY. They ought never to have come at all.

GEORGE. Cicely—for the last time I ask you—let's stop dead now—and finish with all our bickering and beastliness. I mean it. We can't go on like this; we must pull ourselves together—make an effort.

CICELY. If you send Sholto and Gerda away, I'll think about it; but if you expect me to be nice and charming——

GEORGE [*losing control*]. Well, I shall never expect you to be nice and charming—and I shall never ask them to go away. They shall come as often as they like, and stay as long as they like. I was preparing myself to do without them, but now I realize I couldn't. I—couldn't ever, and I don't intend to try. [*Turns away.*

CICELY [*quietly*]. I shall leave you, George.

GEORGE. I shouldn't, if you don't like being the laughing-stock of the county.

CICELY [*bursting into tears of rage*]. You've been horrible to me lately—all the time—you don't love me any more, and you let every one see it.

GEORGE. What steps have you taken lately towards making me love you? [*Laughs.*] Oh, this is all so stupid and useless! To-night I made an effort to bury the hatchet, and you turned me down, as you always turn me down. We'd better go on as we are—cactus-hedges—so ornamental and so damned uncomfortable.

[*Exit* GEORGE, *to the dining-room.*

[CICELY *sits on sofa down stage, and twists her handkerchief into knots; she exudes fury at every pore.*

[*Enter* RODDY, *from front door.*

RODDY. Hallo, Cicely. What time are you all starting? Why, what's the matter?

CICELY. Nothing.

RODDY. Cicely, tell me.

CICELY. I tell you there's nothing.

RODDY. Why have you been crying, then?

CICELY. I have a headache and I'm generally depressed.

RODDY. Have you had a row with George?

CICELY. I wish you wouldn't say that. It—it sounds horrible.

RODDY [*doggedly*]. Well, have you?

CICELY. Oh, Roddy, don't go on cross-examining me.

RODDY [*sits by her*]. Now look here, Cicely; this is the last time I shall see you for months, and I won't have you unhappy without knowing the cause. I suppose you imagine that I'm not worthy of your confidence—that I haven't meant everything I've said——

CICELY. No, Roddy, no——

RODDY. Tell me—has George discovered about us?

CICELY. Yes.

RODDY. When? To-night?—just now?

CICELY. No; a week ago.

RODDY. Why, in God's name, didn't you let me know?

CICELY. Oh, what was the use?

RODDY [*firmly*]. This is the use—it means, you must come away with me—at once. You couldn't stay on here, with George knowing everything; it would be intolerable for you. I love you, Cicely; you know I do. I love you more than I've ever loved anyone before. [*She turns away.*] You've got to believe it. I want you—there's no sense in sticking to a man who no longer gives a damn for you—I love you, I love you, I love you! I feel I must go on saying it, over and over again, to try and convince you. I'll make you happy, gloriously happy. Don't turn me down, for God's sake! I can't go away without you now; I should go off my head longing for you, aching for you. Come with me, come with me. You must, you must . . .

CICELY [*suddenly*]. Very well, I will come away with you. I hate George, I hate his children, I hate his house, I hate everything to do with him. How I've stood it for so long I can't imagine—his stupid jokes and what he thinks is a subtle sense of humour, the way he cringes —"Don't let's be bitter and horrid any more"—what a manly choice of expressions! "Bitter and horrid!" Oh, I tell you I hate him. If you want me, I'll go wherever you take me.

RODDY. Do you mean it? Do you honestly mean it?

CICELY [*hysterically*]. Yes, yes! can't you see I mean it? He can go back to his beastly Jennifer—Jennifer, Jennifer, Jennifer! I get nothing but Jennifer from morning till night. Well, I wish her joy of him, and dear Sholto and Gerda—"such adorable young devils, with such adorable senses of humour!" Self-satisfied, odious little toads! I hate them and I hate George. Do you want me to come with you to-morrow?

RODDY. No—to-night, before you change your mind.

CICELY [*rather tremulous*]. Do you really love me like that, Roddy? How wonderful of you!

RODDY. You know I do—now.

CICELY. What time does the boat sail to-morrow?

RODDY. Four-thirty from Liverpool. You'll have to see about a passport.

CICELY. Shall I have time?

RODDY. Yes, if you can get to London before to-morrow morning We'll motor up to-night.

CICELY. How, without George finding out and trying to stop us?

RODDY. You'll have to pack a few things, won't you?

CICELY. Yes; it won't take a moment. Listen; meet me about two hours after we get to the ball, and motor me back here—I'll pick up my suitcase, leave a note for George, and we can go right away. Your stuff can be sent straight to Liverpool.

RODDY [*embracing her*]. Oh, you're wonderful—wonderful!

CICELY [*struggling*]. No, no, not now. Wait. George must know nothing until we've gone—oh, wait——

RODDY. Let them all come in—I don't care—I'm going to kiss you —now! [*He kisses her passionately.*

QUICK CURTAIN

## SCENE 2

*When the curtain rises the stage is in darkness. The noise of a car is heard retreating.*

SHOLTO *and* GERDA *enter and turn up lamp by staircase. There is still a certain amount of light from the fire.* GERDA *takes off her cloak and flings it over banisters; then sinks into armchair with a sigh.*

GERDA. What time is it?

SHOLTO [*looking at wrist-watch*]. Half-past two. I expect that depressing orgy will go on until five or six. Thank heavens, the Brodies gave us a lift home!

GERDA. Yes, I couldn't have put up with another minute. I suppose it was too much to hope that the county would be able to dance as well as ride.

SHOLTO. I loved it all—the floral decorations and the nice jolly girls in pinks and blues and the heat and every one treading on every one else—— Such a merry prank! [*Crosses to settee.*

GERDA. I'm sorry you didn't have a rag, dear. I hoped you'd trip somebody up, or do something roguish like Donald Hake.

SHOLTO. Dear Donald Hake! Did you enjoy your dance with him?

GERDA. Awfully. His hands were like wet hot-water bottles.

SHOLTO. And your passionate waltz with Claud Eccles?

GERDA. That was sheer ecstasy too. Have you ever danced with a threshing-machine?

SHOLTO. Not yet—but Bounding Julia's nearly as bad. Oh, I do wish we were in Alassio, at the Combattente.

GERDA. On a *festa* night——

SHOLTO. With Tonio and Gianetta and Maria.

GERDA. And Giuseppe dressed as Pierrot, and all the confetti and everything—— Sholto, let's go back.

SHOLTO. Not without Father.

GERDA [*dismally*]. We could stop in Paris for a day or two——

SHOLTO [*equally dismal*]. To do some shopping and go to some plays——

GERDA [*hopelessly*]. Then—the Orient Express!

SHOLTO. Damn the Orient Express!

GERDA. Oh, we've been fools! If only we'd never come at all, we shouldn't have wanted him—so much.

SHOLTO. It will be absolutely miserable, that journey alone—after all we said this evening.

GERDA. I felt him trembling all the time—didn't you?

SHOLTO. Yes.

GERDA. And his face when he said about Mother's memory taunting him—I could have cried!

SHOLTO. Yes.

GERDA. You see, he wants to come back to us so desperately.

SHOLTO. If only it weren't for his beastly principles——

GERDA. He wouldn't be such a darling without them.

SHOLTO. No—I suppose not.

GERDA. But to think that his future happiness and Mother's and ours hangs on Cicely—it's miserable!

SHOLTO. I *did* hope she'd do something desperate to-night—— After all, Roddy leaves England to-morrow.

GERDA. Couldn't we force Cicely on board the boat as a cabin-boy or something?

SHOLTO. It's too late now. We've failed in our little mission. Let's go to bed before we burst into tears.

[*They take hands and go towards stairs.*

GERDA [*taking up cloak*]. All right. Turn out the light, dear—— [*She yawns.*] Oh, I'm so tired!

SHOLTO [*switching off light*]. Damn everything!

[*They go slowly upstairs in the firelight.*

GERDA. I rather wish we hadn't put Priscilla up to Cicely and Roddy. She's sure to go and blurt it out to every one; she's such an utter idiot.

SHOLTO. It doesn't make any odds—now.

[*They just reach the top of the stairs when the noise of a car is heard. The headlights shine right across the windows as it pulls up outside.*

SHOLTO. Who can it be? Father?

GERDA. Go down and look through the window.

[*They both run down and look through the windows.*

SHOLTO [*excitedly*]. It's Roddy!

GERDA. And Cicely—alone! Hide behind the curtains—quick!

[SHOLTO *goes up for coat, puts chair back. They conceal themselves behind curtains.*

[*Enter* CICELY *and* RODDY.

[RODDY *turns up lights.*

CICELY. I've only got to get my motor-coat and hat—and the two bags——

RODDY [*following her upstairs*]. What about the note?

CICELY. That's already written. I did it before I went out.

RODDY. You darling! [*Exeunt both upstairs.*

[SHOLTO *and* GERDA *come out of their hiding-place.*

GERDA. What luck!

SHOLTO [*in a joyous whisper*]. They're going to do it, after all. What luck! Oh, Gerda——

GERDA. Sshh! We mustn't let them hear us. I wouldn't disturb them for the world.

SHOLTO. This will clinch things finally—absolutely. He'll *have* to divorce her. . . .

GERDA. And come back with us. . . It's too, too wonderful! Sholto darling—it's all going to be all right——

SHOLTO. They'll be down in a minute—we'd better get back.

GERDA. Yes.

[*They are just about to reconceal themselves when there is the noise of another car drawing up outside.*

SHOLTO [*in anguish, looking through window*]. My hat! It's Father!

GERDA. And Priscilla! What are we to do? Quick! they'll spoil everything——

SHOLTO [*grimly*]. That's what they've come for. Priscilla's found out, and warned him—the stupid, blundering little fool!

GERDA [*frantically*]. Oh, quick, quick!—what are we to do? What are we to do? Cicely and Roddy—they're coming down——

SHOLTO. Hide—don't come out till it's absolutely necessary.

[*They hide behind curtains again. There is the noise of outer hall door opening.*

[*Re-enter* CICELY, *in travelling coat and hat, followed by* RODDY *with two bags. As they reach the bottom of the stairs* PRISCILLA *and* GEORGE *enter.*

PRISCILLA [*thoroughly in the picture, rushing forward*]. Oh, Cicely, Cicely—thank God we came in time! Stop, stop! You mustn't do this fearful thing—you'll break George's heart! He loves you, I love you, we all love you—— Look before you leap—I mean, don't leap —I mean——

CICELY. Priscilla—how dare you!

GEORGE [*firmly*]. Be quiet, Mrs Hartleberry. Cicely, what does this mean?

PRISCILLA [*turns to* GEORGE, *hysterically*]. Don't you see? It's what I told you—we came in the nick of time. Cicely, think of your honour, your good name—— [*She bursts into tears.*

GEORGE. Please, Mrs Hartleberry, will you calm yourself? Cicely, I should like an explanation.

CICELY [*handing him a note*]. Here's the explanation—there's nothing to say. I'm quite determined.

GEORGE [*taking it and tearing it neatly across*]. The farewell note—thank you, Cicely. How dramatic! Roddy, will you please go? I wish to talk to my wife.

RODDY. Not without Cicely.

CICELY. There's nothing to talk about—my mind is quite made up.

GEORGE. On the contrary, there are several things to discuss. Roddy, I wish to talk to Cicely privately.

CICELY. Roddy, stay, please. You'd better say whatever you have to say quickly, George; we haven't very much time.

GEORGE. Very well. You wish to leave me for Roddy—openly?

CICELY [*defiantly*]. Yes.

GEORGE. I forbid it.

CICELY. You can't prevent it.

PRISCILLA. Oh, Cicely, how can you? It's wicked—it's——

[*She sobs and comes round to front of settee.*

GEORGE. Do you realize what you are doing? You're chucking home, position——

PRISCILLA. Your honour, your good name——

CICELY. I love Roddy, and I'm going away with him. I wish you'd put an end to this scene, George, and let us go.

GEORGE. You're going abroad to restricted Colonial society, with a man to whom you are not married. Can't you imagine what hell it will be? You'll be cut—universally—you won't like being cut, Cicely. Why don't you pause and think? You don't love Roddy really, you know.

CICELY. I do.

GEORGE. No, you don't love anyone. You're taking this step because you're rather tired of me, and in a general bad temper over everything. Those are not very good reasons for an elopement.

RODDY [*hotly*]. You're wrong—we've loved each other for months —that is, at least, we've——

GEORGE. Will you please let me speak?

CICELY. This is all useless, anyhow—can't you see it is? Nothing you say will make any difference.

GEORGE. Cicely—once and for all, don't make this stupid blunder. Stay with me—have one more try to settle down contentedly. I'll help all I can, I promise—then, if it really is a failure, in spite of our united efforts, we'll arrange things quietly, without scandal. I'll let you divorce me, or——

CICELY [*rather shaken*]. George, it's very magnanimous of you—— I don't know that I——

RODDY [*anxiously*]. Cicely!

CICELY [*putting her hand to her head*]. Don't, Roddy—let me think. I——

[SHOLTO *and* GERDA *simultaneously burst from behind the curtains and more or less fling themselves upon* CICELY.

GERDA. Oh, Stepmother! Oh, Stepmother!

SHOLTO [*dramatically*]. Don't go, don't go, dear Stepmother. Cicely! Don't go——

GERDA. We want you with us—we're going to stay here always——

SHOLTO. We can have such happy, happy times together——

GERDA. Just you and Daddy and us.

SHOLTO. Sometimes Mother can come and stay with us, too.

CICELY [*shaking with fury*]. This is intolerable—intolerable! Don't speak to me, any of you—I hate you—I hate you all. I've finished with you, George, for ever—do you hear?—absolutely! I never want to see you again. Come, Roddy. [*Going.*

[GEORGE *makes a last effort.*

PRISCILLA [*rushing after* CICELY *and clutching her*]. Cicely, Cicely! For God's sake, stop! Their mother ran away with a count and drinks like a fish! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

[CICELY *shakes her off, and goes out with* RODDY.

[PRISCILLA *staggers into* GEORGE'S *arms, sobbing. He tries vainly to rid himself of her.*

SHOLTO [*suddenly*]. Great Scott! They've forgotten the bags! After them—quick——!

[SHOLTO *and* GERDA *each snatch up a bag and rush off.*

# ACT III

SCENE: *The living-room of* MRS BRENT'S *villa in Alassio, Italy, three weeks later.*

*When the curtain rises the stage is in semi-darkness; the outline of the room can be vaguely distinguished in the gloom. Two very large arches at the back, with green shutters down over them.*

MARIA *enters quietly, and commences to pull up the shutters. As she does so the room is flooded with hot sunlight. It becomes obvious that the walls are painted salmon colour, and there are various coloured cushions and rugs lying about. There is a grand piano and a huge bureau writing-desk. On the writing-desk there are two big frames containing photographs of* CICELY *and* GEORGE *respectively. The writing-desk is littered with papers; a typewriter stands on the floor beside it. The whole room has a 'lived in' atmosphere; colours are jumbled together irrespective of what goes with which, but the result is thoroughly pleasing and comfortable. There is a straight line of terrace outside, also painted salmon-pink; beyond this can be seen the tops of two or three cypresses, and then deep blue sky and sea.*

*As* MARIA *lets the sunlight into the room* JENNIFER *sits up on the couch right on which she has been resting. She is a 'chic,' golden-haired woman, dressed in a scarlet overall, with a belt.* MARIA *comes down to settee.*

JENNIFER. What time is it, Maria?

MARIA. Five minutes past three, *signora.*

JENNIFER. I thought I told you not to disturb me until four?

MARIA. *Si, signora,* but Signor Walkin has just arrived. [*She sniggers.*] He has with him a large bunch of flowers.

JENNIFER. How typical! Wait a moment, Maria; I suppose I must see him. Fancy clambering up that steep hill so soon after lunch! Americans have no repose. Give me my bag. It's on my desk.

MARIA. *Si, signora.*

[MARIA, *in taking bag from desk, knocks the photograph of* CICELY *on to the floor.*

JENNIFER. That is the third time within the last week that you have knocked down my late husband's second wife's photograph.

[MARIA *picks it up and scrutinizes it.*

MARIA [*disgustedly*]. It is not broken. [*She bangs it down on desk.*

JENNIFER. You did it on purpose!

MARIA [*hotly*]. She is a cow. I know it.

JENNIFER [*sharply*]. Maria!—that is not the way to speak—anyhow, in English. If you must be disrespectful, keep to Italian.

MARIA. *Vacca! Figlia di molte vacce!*

JENNIFER. Maria, that's enough. Give me my bag at once.

[MARIA *gives her her bag, and then returns to desk and gazes at* GEORGE'S *photograph.*

MARIA. He very beautiful man!

JENNIFER [*powdering her nose*]. No, Maria; boundless charm, but *not* beautiful.

MARIA [*shaking her head sorrowfully*]. *Dio mio*, it is sad!

JENNIFER. Go away, Maria; you are getting on my nerves.

MARIA. *Si, signora.*

JENNIFER [*rising and patting her hair into place before glass*]. Show Mr Walkin in.

MARIA. *Si, signora.*

JENNIFER. You speak English very well now, Maria, but I do wish you'd remember to say "Very good" when I ask you to do anything. English butlers always say it; it gives one a nice feeling of security.

MARIA. Ver' good, *signora.*

JENNIFER. That's right. [MARIA *goes out, and in a moment returns.*

MARIA [*announcing*]. Mister Walkin.

[*Enter* HIRAM J. WALKIN. *He is a prosperous, stout man of about fifty.*

HIRAM. Mrs Brent, please forgive me for coming up so early, but I had to bring you these. [*He offers her a large bunch of orchids.*

JENNIFER. How perfectly delightful of you. Sit down and talk to me. [*To* MARIA] Maria, fetch me that tall blue vase from my bedroom—no; take these and put them into it—carefully, with a nice lot of water. [HIRAM *puts down hat at the back.*

MARIA [*taking them*]. Ver' good, *signora.*

JENNIFER [*smiling at* HIRAM]. Wait—I think I'd rather like to wear one. [*She detaches one from the bunch.*

[HIRAM *beams with delight.*

HIRAM. I knew that your youngsters are coming back to-day.

JENNIFER. Yes, isn't it splendid? I've missed them terribly.

HIRAM. I'm looking forward to making their acquaintance. I just love children.

JENNIFER [*raising her eyebrows*]. Children? Well—er—you won't be disappointed if they don't cluster round your knee, will you? I haven't brought them up to cluster.

HIRAM. You bet I shan't! I like kids to be independent.

JENNIFER. That's right. You'll be pleased.

HIRAM. Plucky little devils, going all that way by themselves.

JENNIFER. I feel I ought to tell you, Mr Walkin, that . . . [*She*

*smiles.*] Well, perhaps, after all, it isn't necessary—you'll see for yourself. Would you like anything cool to drink? Maria is so good at mixing things up. [*Sits at desk.*

HIRAM. No, thanks. I—er—knew your children were returning to-day.

JENNIFER [*brightly*]. Yes—I know you knew.

HIRAM. And I came up here specially—because——

JENNIFER. Now don't tell me it's the same old purpose in a different disguise. My last answer was quite final.

HIRAM. Mrs Brent—by the way, you let me call you Jennifer last time.

JENNIFER. Yes, I was wondering why you were being so formal with me to-day. Call me anything you like—that is, I mean, anything in reason.

HIRAM. And you said you'd call me—Hiram.

JENNIFER [*firmly*]. Never—never! If I were married to you eighteen times, I should never call you Hiram. As a name, I dislike it intensely. But this is mere trifling——

HIRAM. I guess I've got to propose to you again, Jennifer.

JENNIFER [*wearily*]. Go on, then.

HIRAM [*sits*]. Will you marry me?

JENNIFER [*calmly*]. Yes.

HIRAM [*flabbergasted*]. What! You will? You say yes?

JENNIFER [*with a sigh*]. Yes.

HIRAM. But you said your last answer was quite final.

JENNIFER. So it was at the time, but I've been thinking things over since then . . .

HIRAM. You are tantalizing! [*Rises.*] I——

JENNIFER [*warding him off*]. Now wait a moment. This ought by rights to be a great moment in both our lives; let's endeavour to keep calm in it. Sit down again.

HIRAM. But—but—you've bowled me over—you've——

JENNIFER. All the more reason for you to sit down. [*He sits.*] I have a lot to say to you. You have been a very persistent wooer, Mr—Walkin.

HIRAM [*appealingly*]. Hiram!

JENNIFER [*firmly*]. Never. We'll think of a name for you afterwards. I said you have been a very persistent wooer, and though you haven't exactly swept me off my feet, you certainly have worn me down. I have said yes, but before we come to any definite arrangement there are several facts that will have to be faced.

HIRAM [*eagerly*]. Look here, I don't care how many facts there are, I——

JENNIFER. If you don't listen to me quietly, I shall go and have a bath.

HIRAM. Proceed.

JENNIFER. Well, to begin with, I don't love you—any more than you love me——

HIRAM [*protesting*]. Here—I guess I've——

JENNIFER [*holding up her hand*]. Please let me go on. You were going to protest undying affection and heartfelt passion—— Well, that's all rubbish. We are both getting too old for either of those things. Don't think I'm unable to see your point in wanting to marry me. I can see it perfectly. I'm quite nice to look at, something of a celebrity, very amusing as a companion, and you *think* you're in love with me——

HIRAM. I *am* in love with you.

JENNIFER. Well, we'll let that pass for a moment. The fact remains —that I'm not in the least in love with you. [*He rises.*] I know it's a dreadful habit being perfectly frank, but occasionally it becomes necessary. I like you—enormously—— [*He sits again.*] You're altogether a charming person, and I'm willing to marry you, for many reasons.

HIRAM. It will be springing a grand surprise on the youngsters.

JENNIFER. They're one of the reasons. I've often felt that there should be a man in the background to help and advise them—that's why I sent them over to England to see their father; not that he would be much use—he gets so dreadfully muddled—but still . . . You would be good for Sholto; having been wildly ambitious all your life, you might be able to inspire him with some of it. And it would be so nice for them to live in your house; it's so much nearer the sea, and they'd be able to run straight out, with mackintoshes over their bathing-dresses—that's another of the reasons.

HIRAM. You're a wonderful woman——!

JENNIFER [*ignoring his interruption*]. Also, they'll probably want to marry, or emigrate, or something tiresome, and I should be left alone —I hate being alone at any time; growing old is a dreary enough performance even when one is surrounded by grandchildren, and kindly relatives, and pattering feet——

HIRAM. I was thinking of that too.

JENNIFER. Oh, well! you need never want for pattering feet. I'm sure that there are lots of people who'd be charmed to marry you, apart from me altogether. You're a very rich man, you know——

HIRAM. I had noticed it.

JENNIFER. I feel more comfortable now that I have told you some of my reasons. There are lots of others, but I shall probably remember them later. Now, let's think of an attractive name for you.

HIRAM. You know, I don't quite get you. You're sometimes very difficult to understand. Are you laughing at me?

JENNIFER. My dear man, of course not. Why should I?

HIRAM. Oh, I don't know—but you were so very determined not to marry me last week, and now you say you will because your children will be able to run out of my house with mackintoshes over their bathing-dresses!

JENNIFER. If you're regretting your proposal, I'll release you without the slightest bitterness—I do see your point of view——

HIRAM. See here! cut that, now! I'm not backing out—— [*Rises.*

JENNIFER [*rises*]. No, but I do—really. I ought either to have become terribly dignified when you asked me, and said, "No; I live only for my work and my little ones!" or else I should have yielded blushingly to your embraces, and said, "I'm so, so tired of living alone, with only Sholto and Gerda and Maria and the cook and my secretary and the dog. Take me; I am yours."

HIRAM. Now you're laughing again! [*Sits.*

JENNIFER [*sits*]. I know it's dreadfully tiresome of me, but you'll soon get used to it. I have never been able to take anything seriously after eleven o'clock in the morning.

HIRAM. Are you going to tell Sholto and Gerda directly they arrive?

JENNIFER. Of course. They *will* be so surprised, the darlings!

[*Enter* MARIA, *hurriedly.*

MARIA. *Signora*, the carriage is coming up the hill—you told me to let you know at once——

JENNIFER. It can't be! It's hours too early.

MARIA. But *si*, *signora*; I see them from the terrace.

JENNIFER [*goes to window left*]. It is, it is! They'll probably get out at the bottom gate and walk up. You'd better go and help with the luggage.

MARIA. *Si*, *signora.*

JENNIFER [*whispering*]. Very good.

MARIA [*obediently*]. Ver' good. [*Exit* MARIA.

JENNIFER. Isn't Maria attractive? She has no morals and many more children than are usual for a single woman. You'd better be waiting in another room, like the lovers in tales of the *Decameron*, and I'll call you out. You can hide in the hall cupboard, if you like.

HIRAM. Why should I hide?

JENNIFER. Oh, of course there's no real necessity, but it's so much more amusing to be a little furtive. They'll probably insist on interviewing you—alone—but don't let them see you're frightened, and all will be well.

HIRAM. I guess they won't scare me.

JENNIFER. Don't be too sure. They once upset the English parson so much when he came to call that he fell into the goldfish-pond from

sheer nervousness. A lot of the goldfish died, too; it was most vexing. Now you go into the dining-room while I break the news and get the first joys of reunion over—then I'll call you.

HIRAM. Would you rather I went away, and came back later?

JENNIFER. Of course not. It will be much more dramatic if I can suddenly produce you. Go along, now——

HIRAM. All right. [*He advances towards her.*] You've made me a darned happy man.

JENNIFER. I *am* so glad. [*She proffers her cheek, which he kisses.*] You'll find some biscuits in a tin box on the sideboard.

[*She pushes him out of the room.*

[*She goes out on to the terrace and waves her handkerchief.*

JENNIFER [*calling*]. Don't run so fast, darlings; you won't have any breath left. [*Comes back into the room.*

[*Enter* SHOLTO *and* GERDA, *a little breathlessly, window right. They stand transfixed for a moment.*

SHOLTO [*dramatically*]. Mother, Mother!—little Mother!

GERDA [*ecstatically*]. Weep no more, tiny Mother—we have come home!

JENNIFER [*with arms outstretched*]. Children, children! Thank God —my babes, at last! [*They rush into her arms.*

SHOLTO [*disentangling himself*]. That's all right. How are you, darling?

JENNIFER. Frightfully well, but I've missed you *dreadfully*! [*They all sit on settee.*] Would you like something to drink? Maria's been awfully clever lately with lemons and oranges and cloves and soda-water all mixed up. It sounds filthy, I know, but it isn't really.

GERDA. We'll have some in a minute—she's dragging our luggage up the hill, at the moment, with Giuseppe.

SHOLTO [*sinking back*]. Whew! It's hot!

JENNIFER. Tell me at once—how was George? and did you like him?

GERDA. Of course we did. He's a darling.

JENNIFER. And did he wear a pink coat when he was hunting? I should love to see George in a pink coat!

SHOLTO. He looked rather like a musical comedy in it.

JENNIFER. He wasn't born for the hunting world; he had it thrust upon him. Did you go to the meets and things?

SHOLTO. I should just think we did! We used to sit in a dog-cart on very cold mornings, with pinched, blue faces, and watch hearty women leaping about on horses—it was awful!

GERDA. And we'd drink lukewarm soup out of a thermos flask, wrap the rug more tightly round our legs and think of the terrace here, in the hot sunlight, with the cypresses and flowers——

SHOLTO. And you reading bits of things out loud to us—— By the way, we must hear what you've done with your new book.

JENNIFER. Yes, I've been wanting your help badly—I'm not a bit satisfied with it.

GERDA. Read it now!

JENNIFER. No, I simply couldn't, on your first day back—there are so many springs of news bubbling up inside all three of us—you'd be sure to stop me in the middle by suddenly remembering something really thrilling that couldn't wait to be told!

GERDA. Yes, we probably should. [*She puts her arms round* JENNIFER'S *neck.*] You are a darling lamb, Mother! What a fool Daddy was!

SHOLTO. Shut up, Gerda! That was most tactless.

GERDA [*wistfully*]. No, but it would have been so lovely if Daddy's second marriage had turned out a failure, and he'd come back to you, and we were all together again. [*She sighs.*] We did try so hard to pull it off.

JENNIFER. Yes, I thought you would. But you see the fact of his being so happy and contented proves that he was right, after all.

GERDA. Yes, I suppose so.

SHOLTO. If only Stepmother Cicely hadn't been so nice!

JENNIFER [*without enthusiasm*]. I'm glad you liked her so much.

GERDA. We adored her. We used to go for long picnics together.

JENNIFER. From what you said just now, I should have thought it was rather cold for picnicking.

SHOLTO [*with a warning glance at* GERDA]. Not at all. We used to wear fur coats, and when we got back we played hide-and-seek all over the house.

GERDA [*reminiscently*]. Sholto and I used to hide behind the curtains, and she and Roddy Masters——

SHOLTO. Such a dear!

JENNIFER [*rather irritably, releasing herself from* GERDA'S *clutch*]. Don't, Gerda—you're tickling the back of my neck.

SHOLTO [*with a look of triumph at* GERDA]. Now we've annoyed her—on our first day back, too! We're beasts.

GERDA. Utter beasts!

JENNIFER [*patting their backs*]. No, no; you're nothing of the sort. But—somehow—it's rather a shock—Cicely being so pleasant.

SHOLTO [*with gentle reproof*]. It's a little dog-in-the-manger of you not to want her to be pleasant.

JENNIFER. Oh, but I do—I'm awfully glad, really, for George's sake. I've wondered so often during the years you've been growing up—whether our parting like that wasn't a very stupid and bitter mistake—but now, you see, I needn't have wondered at all. He's happy, and I've got you—so everything was for the best, wasn't it?

SHOLTO. Yes, Mother—everything.

JENNIFER [*brightly, brushing away her memories*]. And everything's going to be still more for the best.

GERDA. How do you mean, Mummy?

JENNIFER. I've got a surprise for you.

SHOLTO. We've got a *lovely* surprise for you!

JENNIFER. Not such a big one as mine!

SHOLTO. I bet you it is!

JENNIFER. Oh, but, my dears——

SHOLTO. Well, we'll tell you ours first.

JENNIFER. You don't do anything of the sort—I'll tell you mine first. You *will* laugh!

SHOLTO. Look here, we'd better toss for it. [*Takes a coin from his pocket.*] Come on, Mother; you call. [*He tosses it.*

JENNIFER [*eagerly*]. Heads!

SHOLTO. Damn! Heads it is.

GERDA. Go on, darling.

JENNIFER. Well, I give you one guess.

SHOLTO. No, there's no time for guessing—you must tell us.

JENNIFER. Well, it's this—I was a little doubtful as to whether it was a wise step or not, but you've both convinced me that I'm right. Prepare yourselves—I'm going to marry again!

SHOLTO } [*aghast*]. You're what!!
GERDA }

JENNIFER. I knew it would be a bit of a shock—but he's really quite a dear, and so rich. He made his money out of putting soft roes in tins, or something—so resourceful.

SHOLTO. But, Mother, it's—it's impossible—you simply can't!

GERDA [*kicking him furtively*]. Nonsense! Why not? I think it's thrilling. And *what* a surprise! Where is he, Mother?

JENNIFER. In the dining-room, having biscuits—you know, those nice crackly ones you like so much. [GERDA *and* SHOLTO *rise.*

GERDA. We must see him at once.

JENNIFER [*relieved*]. Of course you shall. I am so glad you've taken it so well. I was a little frightened of telling you—but, you see, he has that lovely villa just beyond the convent garden—practically on the beach. Think how convenient it will be——

SHOLTO [*dolefully*]. It will be lovely.

JENNIFER. He honestly is quite devoted to me, and I'm sure, if only you're both a little tolerant, you'll grow very fond of him. He's not unlike your Uncle Bob in appearance, but of course with a much stronger face.

SHOLTO. Uncle Bob was a complete dolt!

JENNIFER. Sshh, Sholto! Your Uncle Bob may have been a little

stupid, but God knows he paid for it when he married your Auntie Clara.

GERDA. All this is beside the point, Mother.

JENNIFER. Nothing of the sort. I want to convince you, before you see him, that I really am doing a sensible thing in agreeing to marry him. It will mean lots and lots of money to do exactly what we like with—we shall be able to travel all over the place—and you know how we've always longed to go to China and Thibet and see all the monasteries and things. We shall be able to indulge all our wildest dreams; and he's got quite a sense of humour, too—I think—anyhow, it will be fun digging for it—and above everything else he really *is* rather nice. I expect it's because he's so emphatically *not* one of the best American families!

SHOLTO. Yes, but, Mother——

JENNIFER. And he told me the most divine things about Chicago. I never dreamt it was such a sweet place—what with the skyscrapers and soda-fountains—like the Palace of Versailles——

GERDA. Those were wine fountains, Mother——

JENNIFER. Well, you know you don't like wine very much—soda'll be ever so much nicer——

GERDA [*to* JENNIFER]. You'll let us interview him alone, Mummy, won't you?

JENNIFER. Yes, if you like; but——

SHOLTO. You see, we feel a little responsible for you.

JENNIFER. Tell me your surprise first.

GERDA [*airily*]. Oh, no, ours will wait—it's not nearly so exciting as yours.

JENNIFER [*apprehensively*]. You *will* be nice to him, won't you?

SHOLTO. We'll be charm personified. Send him in, Mother.

[*Both, on either side of her, take her hands.*

JENNIFER. Now? But we've hardly talked about anything—I'm sure he won't mind waiting a little longer.

GERDA. No; we can talk our heads off afterwards—we must get this over first; see what his intentions are.

JENNIFER. Dear old darlings! [*Rises; kisses them both.*] I'll go and fetch him. Call me when you've finished cross-examining him.

SHOLTO. All right.

JENNIFER [*at door*]. I think he imagines you're about twelve years old. Let him down lightly.

[JENNIFER *goes out.*

[SHOLTO *and* GERDA *look at one another in horror.*

SHOLTO. What are we to do?

GERDA [*frantically*]. This is frightful—frightful! Let me think. . . .

SHOLTO. I suppose we couldn't make him drunk—like David Garrick——?

GERDA. We haven't time——

SHOLTO [*clutching his head; throws himself on couch*]. This is appalling!

GERDA [*pacing up and down in anguish. At dusk*]. Oh, dear! Oh, dear——!

SHOLTO. We must terrify him—lie to him—somehow——

GERDA. I know! Dreadful story about Father—follow my lead, and try not to overdo it. [*The door rattles.*

SHOLTO. All right—look out——

[*Enter* HIRAM, *very sure of himself. He sees the children, and gasps.*

HIRAM. Good God!

SHOLTO. Good afternoon.

GERDA. How do you do?

HIRAM. But, see here, I—you're not—— [*Looking round.*

SHOLTO. I'm afraid we are.

HIRAM [*recovering himself*]. I guess you're much, much older than I expected.

GERDA [*politely*]. Are we?

HIRAM. Your mother's a great little woman.

SHOLTO. Isn't she?

HIRAM [*weakly*]. Yes—she sure is. [*There is a pause.*] She told you that I—we—we're going to be married?

GERDA. Yes. Ah! [*Sighs.*

[HIRAM *looks from one to the other.*

SHOLTO. Oh! [*Sighs.*

HIRAM. Well—what do you say to it?

GERDA [*firmly*]. Close the door, Sholto.

[SHOLTO *obeys in silence.* HIRAM *begins to fidget.*

HIRAM. See here, you know, I——

GERDA. It's all right, Mr—— Mother never told us your name.

HIRAM. Walkin. Hiram J. Walkin.

GERDA. Thank you. I should like to tell you, Mr Walkin, how delighted we are that this has happened. [*She smiles sadly.*

HIRAM. Delighted! I thought you seemed a bit depressed about it.

GERDA [*seriously*]. We have almost prayed for this moment—haven't we, Sholto?

SHOLTO. Yes—almost.

GERDA. Our mother——

SHOLTO [*mechanically*]. God help her!

GERDA. Our mother—we've got to tell you this, Mr Walkin.

HIRAM. See here, are you two trying to put something over on me?

SHOLTO [*reprovingly*]. We should never do that, even if we knew what it meant.

GERDA. You must listen attentively to what we have to say. It' very upsetting, but somehow I feel that you have strength of mind and that I can trust you.

SHOLTO. We can both trust you.

GERDA. Sholto and I have felt it our duty always to tell the rea truth to all the people who have wanted to marry our mother; but thank heaven, something tells me that you won't be like the others and—run away!

HIRAM. What are you getting at?

GERDA. Mother told you that she divorced Father?

HIRAM. She did.

GERDA [*impressively*]. Well, it's not true!

HIRAM. Not true? But—why—what do you mean?

GERDA. Our father—[*her voice breaks*]—our father was put into a lunatic asylum eight years ago.

HIRAM [*astounded*]. What! [*Drops on settee*

SHOLTO. Mother pretends she divorced him—she carried her hea high in spite of all the shame and horror she has had to endure—gallant, gallant little woman——

HIRAM [*incredulously*]. Lunatic asylum! But I——

GERDA [*sits on settee. Gently*]. Now, Mr Walkin, why should we try to tell lies to you? [SHOLTO *sits.*] You will be able to take care of Mother; you will be able to comfort her when she has these uncontrollable fits of depression, which we have endured, willingly, but for so long——

HIRAM [*still distrustful*]. But it's incredible! I mean to say——

GERDA. Lots of frightful things that happen are incredible.

SHOLTO. Father used to be so gay, so merry—and now——

[*He turns away*

GERDA. Now——! [*She turns away*

SHOLTO [*brokenly*]. Now he eats the buttons off padded chairs!

[HIRAM *looks at* SHOLTO

GERDA [*sharply*]. Sholto, pull yourself together! There's no need to harrow poor Mr Walkin with these depressing details. He will have enough to bear, God knows!

SHOLTO. The most fearful thing of all is that it has affected Mother

HIRAM. How do you mean?

GERDA [*frowning at* SHOLTO]. Not much, of course—just the teeniest little bit. She just says rather odd things now and then. You've probably noticed?

HIRAM. You mean she's a bit dippy?

GERDA [*pained*]. Mr Walkin, you are a frank, outspoken man, I know —but not—not—dippy!

HIRAM. Well, then, mentally deranged. [*Rises*

GERDA [*on settee*]. No, no—not quite. [*Bursts into tears.*] We had
tell you this, we had to—don't you understand? We love our
other; we want her to have help and protection; we're so desper-
ely tired! You could take her [*rises*], and we should have no more
this awful sense of responsibility. You're not the sort of man to
e bound down by convention; and no one need ever know you were
—a—bigamist.

SHOLTO. It breaks our hearts sometimes to hear Mother talk of
ather—quite happily and brightly, as though nothing were wrong
ith him. Occasionally, you know, I believe she almost succeeds in
onvincing herself. We went to England hoping against hope that he
ould be better—but no; he was just the same.

GERDA. There were some new chairs—that's all.

[HIRAM *looks at her.*

HIRAM. Where is this—asylum?

SHOLTO [*glibly*]. Just near Guildford—such pretty surroundings.

HIRAM. And your father's there now?

GERDA. Yes, Mr Walkin.

SHOLTO [*glancing at his wrist-watch*]. He's probably just having his
ea—unbreakable crockery, of course.

GERDA. He cried dreadfully when we left him, didn't he, Sholto?

SHOLTO. Dreadfully. He said, "Don't go, don't go!" It was most
arrowing.

GERDA. I can hardly bear to think of it.

HIRAM. And you say there's no chance of his getting well?

[*Enter* GEORGE, *window right.*

GERDA. None! [*Dabs her eyes.*] Oh, Mr Walkin!

SHOLTO [*with the calmness of despair*]. None. I doubt if we shall
ver see him again. [GEORGE *starts on seeing* HIRAM.

GEORGE. Oh! Sholto, Gerda—have you——

SHOLTO [*crosses to* GEORGE *with great presence of mind*]. Why, it's
Ir Peasemarsh!

GERDA [*crosses to* GEORGE, *shaking him warmly by the hand*]. So it is!
fter all this long time!

SHOLTO. We *are* so glad to see you. How's Mrs Peasemarsh?

GERDA. Sholto, you forget! Mrs Peasemarsh was burnt to death
st Tuesday week.

SHOLTO. Oh, I'm so frightfully sorry—you must try not to think
bout it. Let me introduce you to Mr Walkin. Mr Peasemarsh.

HIRAM [*advancing*]. Pleased to meet you, Mr Peasemarsh.

GEORGE [*dazed*]. How do you do? I'm afraid I don't quite under-
and—I——

GERDA [*nudging him*]. We'll explain later.

HIRAM [*suspiciously*]. Explain what later?

GERDA [*hurriedly*]. About you being here, Mr Walkin. Mr Pease marsh is naturally surprised.

HIRAM [*irately*]. In heaven's name, why?

GERDA [*desperately*]. Because of Mother's vow. [*Gently*] Didn't w tell you about Mother's vow?

HIRAM. You did *not*.

GERDA. Well, perhaps you'd better explain, Sholto, while I talk t Fath—Mr Peasemarsh.

HIRAM. I don't want any more explained to me. I——

SHOLTO [*quickly*]. Oh, but you must. You see, it was like this When Mr Peasemarsh was a little boy he and Mother used to pla together, and one day when they were playing at—at—— What wer they playing at, Gerda?

GERDA [*promptly*]. Dances of all nations. And Mother tripped ove the Stars and Stripes, and hurt herself very much; so she made a vo never to let an American cross her threshold——

GEORGE [*unexpectedly*]. I should have thought she was too youn to have a threshold.

SHOLTO. Please don't interrupt, Mr Peasemarsh. We're trying t make things clear to Mr Walkin.

HIRAM. Clear! Good God!!

GERDA. Sshh! Now, will you listen?

HIRAM [*loudly*]. No, I will not listen. [*Crosses to centre.*] You've both been joshing me all along, and I've had about enough of it——

SHOLTO. But, Mr Walkin——

HIRAM. Don't lie to me any more. Do you think I'm half-witted Do you imagine that I can't see you're trying to get rid of me? I you don't want me to marry your mother, why the hell couldn't you say so?

GEORGE [*sharply*]. What!

GERDA. There now!—you've upset Mr Peasemarsh.

GEORGE [*losing control*]. My name is *not* Peasemarsh!!!

[GERDA *and* SHOLTO *go up to* GEORGE *and surround him*

[*Enter* MARIA. *She pauses for a moment, looks from* GEORGE *to the photograph on desk, then back again. Then, with a shrill cry of recognition, she rushes at him and, clasping his hands, covers them with kisses.*

[HIRAM *moves to left.*

MARIA [*ecstatically*]. *Il Padrone—Il Padrone—Il Padrone! Sia tornato—l'ho sognato sta sera—Madonna mia adesso tutto stara benissimo! Porta la felicità alla Signora—Oh, signor, signor, che miracolo! Dio mio!*

SHOLTO. *Stai zita, Maria, stai zita!*

[*Everybody proceeds to talk at the top of their voices—the noise is deafening.*

GERDA. Please, Mr Walkin, don't be cross. Come back in about an hour, and we'll explain everything properly, and you'll understand perfectly why we've been behaving like this. It——

GEORGE. I should very much like to know what you meant just now, sir, when you said—— I come here, and a perfect stranger suddenly announces that he is intending to marry my wife——

SHOLTO. It's all quite simple, if you'll only listen to reason. Our mother is a most peculiar woman, and she has always——

HIRAM. I guess you're all trying to put something over on me, and I should like you to know that I'm not the sort of man to be joshed up hill and down dale by a set of——

MARIA. *Dio grazia—Dio grazia—Dio grazia!!!* [*Enter* JENNIFER.

JENNIFER. I never heard such a noise! What are you all shouting about? *George!!!*

GEORGE. Jennifer!

SHOLTO. That's done it!

JENNIFER. This is infamous!

HIRAM [*ominously*]. I'm beginning to see things a bit more clearly now.

GERDA } [*to* HIRAM, *together*]. If you'll only let us explain——
SHOLTO }

HIRAM. God forbid!

GEORGE [*oblivious of all but* JENNIFER]. Jennifer—I've come back.

JENNIFER. That would be obvious to the meanest intelligence. Mr Walkin——

HIRAM [*with biting sarcasm*]. I guess it isn't necessary to try to explain anything more to me—I know all. Sholto and Gerda have made it perfectly clear. I'm sorry that your husband eats chairs in an asylum, and I'm sorry that you played with Mr Peasemarsh when he was a boy, and tripped over the Stars and Stripes—it must have been most painful. I'm also sorry that you hadn't the moral courage to tell me I was unwelcome, and that you had to employ your dear children to do it for you. [*Crosses and gets hat.*

JENNIFER [*startled*]. My poor man, you're talking nonsense!

SHOLTO [*boarsely*]. Sshhh! Be gentle, Mother. Mr Walkin is not quite as other men!

GERDA [*whispering*]. He had a bad fall when he was a child, and——

[HIRAM *comes down centre.*

HIRAM [*struggling manfully to control his rage*]. Mrs Brent, I release you unconditionally from your engagement to me. On closer acquaintance, I find I couldn't altogether cope with your—your—[*he looks venomously at* SHOLTO *and* GERDA] your atmosphere! I am going straight back to Chucago. [*Up to window left.*

JENNIFER [*following up to window; distressed*]. Won't you have some tea before you go?

HIRAM [*still fighting for politeness, but shouting*]. No! Thank you very much. No!! [*He stamps off on to the terrace.*]

JENNIFER. It's perfectly disgraceful of you to upset that poor man like that. You've placed me in an appalling position, and I refuse to speak a word to any of you.

[*She makes a dive for the door, but* GERDA *and* SHOLTO *bar the way.*

[*The three sit on settee.*

GERDA. Now, Mummy, do sit down and keep calm. Daddy's awfully in love with you, and has been all the time, and he's come over with us to make a formal proposal.

SHOLTO. Don't go and spoil everything by being obstinate.

GERDA. Think how wonderful it will be—all together again! He is such a darling! [*Enter* MARIA.

MARIA [*comes down, excited*]. Yes—yes—all together—that is good! [*In Italian*[1]] The saints will preserve us and keep us rich to the end of our lives.

SHOLTO [*in Italian*]. Go away now, Maria; we'll come and talk to you in the kitchen presently.

MARIA. Ver' good, *signor*. [*She goes out, laughing happily.*

JENNIFER [*on settee; almost in tears*]. I shall never forgive either of you for this——

GEORGE. Jennifer!

JENNIFER. How dare you spring on me without any warning—like—like a rattlesnake!!!

GEORGE. They made me come.

JENNIFER [*quickly*]. Then you didn't want to?

GEORGE. You *know* I did.

JENNIFER [*crossly*]. Well, all I can say is, it's very inconsiderate.

GEORGE [*irately*]. It's nothing of the sort. It's a pleasant surprise.

JENNIFER [*rises*]. Pleasant! Huh! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

GERDA [*softly to* SHOLTO]. It's all right; they're going to have a row. Come on. [*They commence to retreat quietly.*

GEORGE [*quite cross*]. Why should I be ashamed just because I love you still?

JENNIFER. Where's Cicely? [GERDA *and* SHOLTO *go out window, left.*

GEORGE. Damn Cicely!

JENNIFER. I consider that remark in very bad taste. I suppose, when you first married Cicely, you used to damn Jennifer all day long!

[1] *Che felicità, che felicità, che romanzo, dopo tanti anni! L'amore c'e che l'amore!*
SHOLTO. *Lasci, lasci, Maria; vai al' cucino—subito vai, vai——*
MARIA. *Che cosa e caduto?*
SHOLTO. *Ti contero dopo piu tardi.*
MARIA. *Si, signor.*
[*She goes out, laughing happily.*

GEORGE. Cicely's left me for good and all. I shall never see her again.

JENNIFER. Have you any aspirin on you?

GEORGE. No; I'm so sorry.

JENNIFER. I'm sure I shall have a headache in a minute. To have you suddenly reappearing like this is enough to unman any woman.

GEORGE. Don't trifle with me—don't be flippant. This is our first meeting after fifteen years. Let's treat it in the proper spirit.

JENNIFER. If only you'd given me a little warning, I could have worked myself up into the right atmosphere without the least trouble. I should have put a lamp in the window.

GEORGE [*appealingly*]. Jennifer!

JENNIFER. As it is, I'm taken utterly by surprise.

GEORGE. Let's wait to discuss it until later, when the shock has worn off a bit.

JENNIFER. Are you really so eager, then?

GEORGE [*crosses to* JENNIFER]. I want to come back here to you and the children more than anything in the world, Jennifer. [*He catches her hand.*] Don't be tiresome.

JENNIFER. Really, you are *amazing*! After living fourteen years with another woman, you drop out of a cloudless sky and call me tiresome.

GEORGE. Well, you are—thoroughly!

JENNIFER. Perhaps I am—rather. [*Sits on settee.*

GEORGE. Jennifer—in a few months all the divorce business will be settled—and we're both getting on, you know—we shan't be as temperamental as we used to be.

JENNIFER. Nonsense! I shall always be temperamental—that's just it. You jump at conclusions so. As a matter of fact, I'm ever so much worse than I was, having been left alone to do as I like.

GEORGE [*sits*]. I'm not afraid.

JENNIFER. If I agree to marry you again, I want you to understand that it will be solely on account of Sholto and Gerda.

GEORGE. Very well.

JENNIFER. And I should like to arrange things on a more or less business basis. We must make a list of the subjects that we cannot discuss calmly. [*Counting on her fingers*] Religion, George Moore, democracy, my novels——

GEORGE [*amiably*]. I won't criticize a word of your novels, if you don't want me to.

JENNIFER. I don't mind your criticisms, George, as long as they're sensible and enthusiastic.

GEORGE. Anything more?

JENNIFER. Certainly. You mustn't dominate me—I hate being dominated.

GEORGE. I never did.

JENNIFER. And you must never try to make me eat things I don't like—you always used to.

GEORGE. I didn't.

JENNIFER. Yes, you did. One of our fiercest quarrels started with apple pudding.

GEORGE. You were so faddy.

JENNIFER. Never mind; I like being faddy.

GEORGE [*meekly*]. All right.

JENNIFER. Promise me that you won't persuade me to live in England for good.

GEORGE. I promise.

JENNIFER. And, above all things, you must never become reminiscent about Cicely.

GEORGE. You will want to talk about Cicely more than I shall

JENNIFER. Oh, no, I shan't!

GEORGE. Won't you say "Yes" or "No" now?

JENNIFER. There you go, dominating me!

GEORGE. Will you answer one question?

JENNIFER. That depends. What is it?

GEORGE. Do you care for me at all—any more?

JENNIFER. I suppose I do, really, but still, that doesn't settle things by any means. I had to crush down so much unhappiness fifteen years ago that—do you know, I believe I crushed all my capacity for happiness with it also. The fact of our caring for one another didn't prevent our quarrelling before.

GEORGE. We're older now.

JENNIFER. I know. There's no need to keep harping on it.

GEORGE. You're much too sensible to mind growing old.

JENNIFER. Am I? I wonder!

GEORGE. I know. Once we're together again, it won't matter a bit. There's such a lot of happiness waiting for us just round the corner—if only we're careful.

JENNIFER. Perhaps!

GEORGE [*going towards her*]. Jennifer—you are a darling.

JENNIFER [*rises, warding him off*]. George, it's too late. That poor American—I've given my word.

GEORGE. He released you from it.

JENNIFER. Only because he was cross. I can't let him go all the way back to Chicago by himself.

GEORGE. He'll have to. He doesn't love you as much as I do.

JENNIFER. More, I'm afraid. You see, not having been married to me before, he doesn't know of my disadvantages.

GEORGE [*firmly*]. I'm sorry, but he'll have to do without you.

JENNIFER [*horrified*]. George, how can you be so selfish?

GEORGE. I love you.

JENNIFER. So does he, and you're calmly suggesting that I should break his heart!

GEORGE [*unmoved*]. Yes.

JENNIFER. No, George—on second thoughts, I'm afraid.

[*Sits at desk.*

GEORGE. Stop, stop! Don't go any longer—I won't have it. I know you, and I can see through you. You determined in your own mind to have me back the very first moment you saw me, and you're prevaricating and arguing just to keep me on the rack. This is one of the most delightful moments in your life, and you're revelling in it at the cost of my peace of mind. You love me—it's no use pretending you don't, because every nerve and instinct I possess is screaming that you do—you do! You only tolerated the thought of that wretched American at all on account of the children. You love me! You love me! You've wanted me all these years, as much as I have wanted you. The sight of you has completely annihilated the time we've been parted. The only thing in the world that matters is Youth. And I've got it back again. I'm twenty-one, and I want to laugh and shout and tear the house down! Come and kiss me!

JENNIFER [*going to him*]. George! You haven't altered a bit!

# STRIFE

## By JOHN GALSWORTHY

*First produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, March 9, 1909*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

John Anthony, *Chairman of the Trenartha Tin Plate Works*
Edgar Anthony, *his son*
Frederic H. Wilder
William Scantlebury
Oliver Wanklin — *Directors of the same*
Henry Tench, *Secretary of the same*
Francis Underwood, C.E., *Manager of the same*
Simon Harness, *a Trade Union official*
David Roberts
James Green
John Bulgin
Henry Thomas
George Rous — *the workmen's committee*
Henry Rous
Lewis
Jago
Evans
A Blacksmith
Davies
A Red-haired Youth — *workmen at the Trenartha Tin Plate Works*
Brown
Frost, *valet to John Anthony*
Enid Underwood, *wife of Francis Underwood, daughter of John Anthony*
Annie Roberts, *wife of David Roberts*
Madge Thomas, *daughter of Henry Thomas*
Mrs Rous, *mother of George and Henry Rous*
Mrs Bulgin, *wife of John Bulgin*
Mrs Yeo, *wife of a workman*
A Parlourmaid *to the Underwoods*
Jan, *Madge's brother, a boy of ten*
A Crowd of Men on Strike

ACT I. *The dining-room of the Manager's house.*
ACT II. SCENE 1. *The kitchen of the Roberts' cottage near the works.*
SCENE 2. *A space outside the works.*
ACT III. *The drawing-room of the Manager's house.*

*The action takes place on February 7, between the hours of noon and six in the afternoon, close to the Trenartha Tin Plate Works, on the borders of England and Wales, where a strike has been in progress throughout the winter.*

THE theatre of Mr John Galsworthy falls into two periods: the pre-War, when audiences in general stayed away from the three plays *The Silver Box*, *Strife*, and *Justice*, and the post-War period, when audiences went for a year to each of the three plays *The Skin Game*, *Loyalties*, and *Escape*. There are, of course, other plays in each period, notably *The Pigeon* (1912) and *Old English* (1924).

"It would be outrageous," wrote Joseph Conrad in the preface to *Chance*, "to deny to the general public the possession of a critical mind." Nevertheless, the general public was at fault in staying away from the first group of Galsworthy plays, and it is possible to feel of the second group that Mr Galsworthy stooped to conquer. Melodrama is to be discerned in the character, for instance, of Hornblower in *The Skin Game*, and one or two of the scenes in *Escape* suggest the playwright's conquering by methods consciously of less dignity than those employed in the earlier plays. This is not wholly matter for regret. *The Skin Game*, as Mr Frank Vernon put it in *The Twentieth-Century Theatre*, "was less than a great Galsworthy, but it was a mighty hyphen . . . bridge-building," and the new audience could, and some of it did (witness the 1928 revival of *Justice*), cross the bridge to the older plays.

Old and new, the Galsworthy plays are plays with a thesis. In *Strife* the thesis is that industrial strikes are futile imbecility. This was not a platitude, certainly not a platitude of the theatre in 1909. The sociological drama is often found to be 'orchestrating platitudes,' especially the platitudes of to-morrow, such as, in *Justice*, the platitude that solitary confinement is an outrage.

Obviously the greatness of the early Galsworthy plays appears to contradict J. M. Synge's definition of drama; but the fact is that, in Galsworthy, the drama transcends the thesis. The thesis is only a symbolical proscenium arch within which the drama occurs. Mrs Jones, not the administration of police-court justice, is the protagonist of *The Silver Box*; Falder and Ruth Honeywill are the protagonists of *Justice*; John Anthony, David Roberts, and Madge Thomas of *Strife*. Where a Greek tragedian impartially exhibited the conflicts of men with each other under the power of Fate, Mr Galsworthy impartially exhibits their conflicts under the blind forces of the social system.

# ACT I

*It is noon. In the* UNDERWOODS' *dining-room a bright fire is burning. On one side of the fireplace are double doors leading to the drawing-room, on the other side a door leading to the hall. In the centre of the room a long dining-table without a cloth is set out as a board table. At the head of it, in the Chairman's seat, sits* JOHN ANTHONY, *an old man, big, clean-shaven, and high-coloured, with thick white hair, and thick dark eyebrows. His movements are rather slow and feeble, but his eyes are very much alive. There is a glass of water by his side. On his right sits his son* EDGAR, *an earnest-looking man of thirty, reading a newspaper. Next him* WANKLIN, *a man with jutting eyebrows, and silver-streaked light hair, is bending over transfer papers.* TENCH, *the Secretary, a short and rather humble, nervous man, with side-whiskers, stands helping him. On* WANKLIN'S *right sits* UNDERWOOD, *the Manager, a quiet man, with a long, stiff jaw, and steady eyes. Back to the fire is* SCANTLEBURY, *a very large, pale, sleepy man, with grey hair, rather bald. Between him and the Chairman are two empty chairs.*

WILDER [*who is lean, cadaverous, and complaining, with drooping grey moustaches, stands before the fire*]. I say, this fire's the devil! Can I have a screen, Tench?

SCANTLEBURY. A screen, ah!

TENCH. Certainly, Mr Wilder. [*He looks at* UNDERWOOD.] That is—perhaps the Manager—perhaps Mr Underwood——

SCANTLEBURY. These fireplaces of yours, Underwood——

UNDERWOOD [*roused from studying some papers*]. A screen? Rather! I'm sorry. [*He goes to the door with a little smile.*] We're not accustomed to complaints of too much fire down here just now.

[*He speaks as though he holds a pipe between his teeth, slowly, ironically.*

WILDER [*in an injured voice*]. You mean the men. H'm!

[UNDERWOOD *goes out.*

SCANTLEBURY. Poor devils!

WILDER. It's their own fault, Scantlebury.

EDGAR [*holding out his paper*]. There's great distress amongst them, according to the *Trenartha News.*

WILDER. Oh, that rag! Give it to Wanklin. Suit his Radical views.

All applications respecting amateur performances of John Galsworthy's plays must be made to the Secretary, Incorporated Society of Authors, 11 Gower Street, London, W.C.1.

They call us monsters, I suppose. The editor of that rubbish ought to be shot.

EDGAR [*reading*]. "If the Board of worthy gentlemen who control the Trenartha Tin Plate Works from their armchairs in London would condescend to come and see for themselves the conditions prevailing amongst their workpeople during this strike——"

WILDER. Well, we *have* come.

EDGAR [*continuing*]. "We cannot believe that even their leg-of-mutton hearts would remain untouched."

[WANKLIN *takes the paper from him.*

WILDER. Ruffian! I remember that fellow when he hadn't a penny to his name; little snivel of a chap that's made his way by blackguarding everybody who takes a different view to himself.

[ANTHONY *says something that is not heard.*

WILDER. What does your father say?

EDGAR. He says "The kettle and the pot."

WILDER. H'm! [*He sits down next to* SCANTLEBURY

SCANTLEBURY [*blowing out his cheeks*]. I shall boil if I don't get that screen.

[UNDERWOOD *and* ENID *enter with a screen, which they place before the fire.* ENID *is tall; she has a small, decided face, and is twenty-eight years old.*

ENID. Put it closer, Frank. Will that do, Mr Wilder? It's the highest we've got.

WILDER. Thanks, capitally.

SCANTLEBURY [*turning with a sigh of pleasure*]. Ah! *Merci, madame!*

ENID. Is there anything else you want, Father? [ANTHONY *shakes his head.*] Edgar—anything?

EDGAR. You might give me a J nib, old girl.

ENID. There are some down there by Mr Scantlebury.

SCANTLEBURY [*handing a little box of nibs*]. Ah! your brother uses J's. What does the Manager use? [*With expansive politeness*] What does your husband use, Mrs Underwood?

UNDERWOOD. A quill!

SCANTLEBURY. The homely product of the goose.

[*He holds out quills.*

UNDERWOOD [*drily*]. Thanks, if you can spare me one. [*He takes a quill.*] What about lunch, Enid?

ENID [*stopping at the double doors and looking back*]. We're going to have lunch here, in the drawing-room, so you needn't hurry with your meeting. [WANKLIN *and* WILDER *bow, and she goes out.*

SCANTLEBURY [*rousing himself, suddenly*]. Ah! Lunch! That hotel—— Dreadful! Did you try the whitebait last night? Fried fat!

WILDER. Past twelve! Aren't you going to read the minutes, Tench?

TENCH [*looking for the* CHAIRMAN's *assent, reads in a rapid and monotonous voice*]. "At a Board Meeting held the 31st of January at the Company's Offices, 512 Cannon Street, E.C. Present—Mr Anthony in the chair, Messrs F. H. Wilder, William Scantlebury, Oliver Wanklin, and Edgar Anthony. Read letters from the Manager dated January, 20th, 23rd, 25th, 28th, relative to the strike at the Company's Works. Read letters to the Manager of January 21st, 24th, 26th, 29th. Read letter from Mr Simon Harness, of the Central Union, asking for an interview with the Board. Read letter from the Men's Committee, signed David Roberts, James Green, John Bulgin, Henry Thomas, George Rous, desiring conference with the Board; and it was resolved that a special Board Meeting be called for February 7th at the house of the Manager, for the purpose of discussing the situation with Mr Simon Harness and the Men's Committee on the spot. Passed twelve transfers, signed and sealed nine certificates and one balance certificate."

[*He pushes the book over to the Chairman.*

ANTHONY [*with a heavy sigh*]. If it's your pleasure, sign the same.

[*He signs, moving the pen with difficulty.*

WANKLIN. What's the Union's game, Tench? They haven't made up their split with the men. What does Harness want this interview for?

TENCH. Hoping we shall come to a compromise, I think, sir; he's having a meeting with the men this afternoon.

WILDER. Harness! Ah! He's one of those cold-blooded, cool-headed chaps. I distrust them. I don't know that we didn't make a mistake to come down. What time'll the men be here?

UNDERWOOD. Any time now.

WILDER. Well, if we're not ready they'll have to wait—won't do 'em any harm to cool their heels a bit.

SCANTLEBURY [*slowly*]. Poor devils! It's snowing. *What* weather!

UNDERWOOD [*with meaning slowness*]. This house'll be the warmest place they've been in this winter.

WILDER. Well, I hope we're going to settle this business in time for me to catch the 6.30. I've got to take my wife to Spain to-morrow. [*Chattily*] My old father had a strike at his works in '69; just such a February as this. They wanted to shoot him.

WANKLIN. What! In the close season?

WILDER. By George, there was no close season for employers then! He used to go down to his office with a pistol in his pocket.

SCANTLEBURY [*faintly alarmed*]. Not seriously?

WILDER [*with finality*]. Ended in his shootin' one of 'em in the legs.

SCANTLEBURY [*unavoidably feeling his thigh*]. No? God bless me!

ANTHONY [*lifting the agenda paper*]. To consider the policy of the Board in relation to the strike. [*There is a silence.*

WILDER. It's this infernal three-cornered duel—the Union, the men, and ourselves.

WANKLIN. We needn't consider the Union.

WILDER. It's my experience that you've always got to consider the Union, confound them! If the Union were going to withdraw their support from the men, as they've done, why did they ever allow them to strike at all?

EDGAR. We've had that over a dozen times.

WILDER. Well, I've never understood it! It's beyond me. They talk of the engineers' and furnacemen's demands being excessive—so they are—but that's not enough to make the Union withdraw their support. What's behind it?

UNDERWOOD. Fear of strikes at Harper's and Tinewell's.

WILDER [*with triumph*]. Afraid of other strikes—now, that's a reason! Why couldn't we have been told that before?

UNDERWOOD. You were.

TENCH. You were absent from the Board that day, sir.

SCANTLEBURY. The men must have seen they had no chance when the Union gave them up. It's madness.

UNDERWOOD. It's Roberts!

WILDER. Just our luck, the men finding a fanatical firebrand like Roberts for leader. [*A pause.*

WANKLIN [*looking at* ANTHONY]. Well?

WILDER [*breaking in fussily*]. It's a regular mess. I don't like the position we're in; I don't like it; I've said so for a long time. [*Looking at* WANKLIN] When Wanklin and I came down here before Christmas it looked as if the men must collapse. You thought so too, Underwood.

UNDERWOOD. Yes.

WILDER. Well, they haven't! Here we are, going from bad to worse—losing our customers—shares going down!

SCANTLEBURY [*shaking his head*]. M'm! M'm!

WANKLIN. What loss have we made by this strike, Tench?

TENCH. Over fifty thousand, sir!

SCANTLEBURY [*pained*]. You don't say!

WILDER. We shall never get it back.

TENCH. No, sir.

WILDER. Who'd have supposed the men were going to stick out like this—nobody suggested that. [*Looking angrily at* TENCH.

SCANTLEBURY [*shaking his head*]. I've never liked a fight—never shall.

ANTHONY. No surrender! [*All look at him.*

WILDER. Who wants to surrender? [ANTHONY *looks at him.*] I—I want to act reasonably. When the men sent Roberts up to the Board

in December—then was the time. We ought to have humoured him; instead of that the Chairman—[*dropping his eyes before* ANTHONY's]—er—we snapped his head off. We could have got them in then by a little tact.

ANTHONY. No compromise!

WILDER. There we are! This strike's been going on now since October, and as far as I can see it may last another six months. Pretty mess we shall be in by then. The only comfort is, the men'll be in a worse!

EDGAR [*to* UNDERWOOD]. What sort of state are they really in, Frank?

UNDERWOOD [*without expression*]. Damnable!

WILDER. Well, who on earth would have thought they'd have held on like this without support!

UNDERWOOD. Those who know them.

WILDER. I defy anyone to know them! And what about tin? Price going up daily. When we do get started we shall have to work off our contracts at the top of the market.

WANKLIN. What do you say to that, Chairman?

ANTHONY. Can't be helped!

WILDER. Shan't pay a dividend till goodness knows when!

SCANTLEBURY [*with emphasis*]. We ought to think of the shareholders. [*Turning heavily*] Chairman, I say we ought to think of the shareholders. [ANTHONY *mutters.*

SCANTLEBURY. What's that?

TENCH. The Chairman says he *is* thinking of you, sir.

SCANTLEBURY [*sinking back into torpor*]. Cynic!

WILDER. It's past a joke. *I* don't want to go without a dividend for years if the Chairman does. We can't go on playing ducks and drakes with the Company's prosperity.

EDGAR [*rather ashamedly*]. I think we ought to consider the men.

[*All but* ANTHONY *fidget in their seats.*

SCANTLEBURY [*with a sigh*]. We mustn't think of our private feelings, young man. That'll never do.

EDGAR [*ironically*]. I'm not thinking of our feelings. I'm thinking of the men's.

WILDER. As to that—we're men of business.

WANKLIN. That *is* the little trouble.

EDGAR. There's no necessity for pushing things so far in the face of all this suffering—it's—it's cruel.

[*No one speaks, as though* EDGAR *had uncovered something whose existence no man prizing his self-respect could afford to recognize.*

WANKLIN [*with an ironical smile*]. I'm afraid we mustn't base our policy on luxuries like sentiment.

EDGAR. I detest this state of things.

ANTHONY. We didn't seek the quarrel.

EDGAR. I know that, sir, but surely we've gone far enough.

ANTHONY. No. [*All look at one another.*

WANKLIN. Luxuries apart, Chairman, we must look out what we're doing.

ANTHONY. Give way to the men once, and there'll be no end to it.

WANKLIN. I quite agree, but—— [ANTHONY *shakes his head.*] You make it a question of bedrock principle? [ANTHONY *nods.*] Luxuries again, Chairman! The shares are below par.

WILDER. Yes, and they'll drop to a half when we pass the next dividend.

SCANTLEBURY [*with alarm*]. Come, come! Not so bad as that.

WILDER [*grimly*]. You'll see! [*Craning forward to catch* ANTHONY's *speech*] I didn't catch——

TENCH [*hesitating*]. The Chairman says, sir, "*Fais que—que—devra——*"

EDGAR [*sharply*]. My father says: "Do what we ought—and let things rip."

WILDER. Tcha!

SCANTLEBURY [*throwing up his hands*]. The Chairman's a Stoic—I always said the Chairman was a Stoic.

WILDER. Much good that'll do us.

WANKLIN [*suavely*]. Seriously, Chairman, are you going to let the ship sink under you, for the sake of—a principle?

ANTHONY. She won't sink.

SCANTLEBURY [*with alarm*]. Not while I'm on the Board I hope.

ANTHONY [*with a twinkle*]. Better rat, Scantlebury.

SCANTLEBURY. What a man!

ANTHONY. I've always fought them; I've never been beaten yet.

WANKLIN. We're with you in theory, Chairman. But we're not all made of cast iron.

ANTHONY. We've only to hold on.

WILDER [*rising and going to the fire*]. And go to the devil as fast as we can!

ANTHONY. Better go to the devil than give in!

WILDER [*fretfully*]. That may suit you, sir, but it doesn't suit me, or anyone else I should think. [ANTHONY *looks him in the face—a silence.*

EDGAR. I don't see how we can get over it that to go on like this means starvation to the men's wives and families.

[WILDER *turns abruptly to the fire, and* SCANTLEBURY *puts out a hand to push the idea away.*

WANKLIN. I'm afraid again that sounds a little sentimental.

EDGAR. Men of business are excused from decency, you think?

WILDER. Nobody's more sorry for the men than I am, but if they [*lashing himself*] choose to be such a pig-headed lot, it's nothing to do with us; we've quite enough on *our* hands to think of ourselves and the shareholders.

EDGAR [*irritably*]. It won't kill the shareholders to miss a dividend or two; I don't see that *that's* reason enough for knuckling under.

SCANTLEBURY [*with grave discomfort*]. You talk very lightly of your dividends, young man; I don't know where we are.

WILDER. There's only one sound way of looking at it. We can't go on ruining *ourselves* with this strike.

ANTHONY. No caving in!

SCANTLEBURY [*with a gesture of despair*]. Look at him!

[ANTHONY *is leaning back in his chair. They do look at him.*

WILDER [*returning to his seat*]. Well, all I can say is, if that's the Chairman's view, I don't know what we've come down here for.

ANTHONY. To tell the men that we've got nothing for them——[*Grimly*] They won't believe it till they hear it spoken in plain English.

WILDER. H'm! Shouldn't be a bit surprised if that brute Roberts hadn't got us down here with the very same idea. I hate a man with a grievance.

EDGAR [*resentfully*]. We didn't pay him enough for his discovery. I always said that at the time.

WILDER. We paid him five hundred and a bonus of two hundred three years later. If that's not enough! What does he want, for goodness' sake?

TENCH [*complainingly*]. Company made a hundred thousand out of his brains, and paid him seven hundred—that's the way he goes on, sir.

WILDER. The man's a rank agitator! Look here, I hate the Unions. But now we've got Harness here let's get him to settle the whole thing.

ANTHONY. No! [*Again they look at him.*

UNDERWOOD. Roberts won't let the men assent to that.

SCANTLEBURY. Fanatic! Fanatic!

WILDER [*looking at* ANTHONY]. And not the only one!

[FROST *enters from the hall.*

FROST [*to* ANTHONY]. Mr Harness from the Union, waiting, sir. The men are here too, sir.

[ANTHONY *nods.* UNDERWOOD *goes to the door, returning with* HARNESS, *a pale, clean-shaven man with hollow cheeks, quick eyes, and lantern jaw*—FROST *has retired.*

UNDERWOOD [*pointing to* TENCH'S *chair*]. Sit there next the Chairman, Harness, won't you?

[*At* HARNESS'S *appearance the Board have drawn together, as it were, and turned a little to him, like cattle at a dog.*

HARNESS [*with a sharp look round, and a bow*]. Thanks! [*He sits—his accent is slightly nasal.*] Well, gentlemen, we're going to do business at last, I hope.

WILDER. Depends on what you *call* business, Harness. Why don't you make the men come in?

HARNESS [*sardonically*]. The men are far more in the right than you are. The question with us is whether we shan't begin to support them again.

[*He ignores them all, except* ANTHONY, *to whom he turns in speaking.*

ANTHONY. Support them if you like; we'll put in free labour and have done with it.

HARNESS. That won't do, Mr Anthony. You can't get free labour, and you know it.

ANTHONY. We shall see that.

HARNESS. I'm quite frank with you. We were forced to withhold our support from your men because some of their demands are in excess of current rates. I expect to make them withdraw those demands to-day: if they do, take it straight from me, gentlemen, we shall back them again at once. Now, I want to see something fixed up before I go back to-night. Can't we have done with this old-fashioned tug-of-war business? What good's it doing you? Why don't you recognize once for all that these people are men like yourselves, and want what's good for them just as you want what's good for you—— [*Bitterly*] Your motor-cars, and champagne, and eight-course dinners.

ANTHONY. If the men will come in, we'll do something for them.

HARNESS [*ironically*]. Is that your opinion too, sir—and yours—and yours? [*The Directors do not answer.*] Well, all I can say is: It's a kind of high and mighty aristocratic tune I thought we'd grown out of—seems I was mistaken.

ANTHONY. It's the tone the men use. Remains to be seen which can hold out longest—they without us, or we without them.

HARNESS. As business men, I wonder you're not ashamed of this waste of force, gentlemen. You know what it'll all end in.

ANTHONY. What?

HARNESS. Compromise—it always does.

SCANTLEBURY. Can't you persuade the men that their interests are the same as ours?

HARNESS [*turning, ironically*]. I could persuade them of that, sir, if they were.

WILDER. Come, Harness, you're a clever man, you don't believe all the Socialistic claptrap that's talked nowadays. There's no real difference between their interests and ours.

HARNESS. There's just one very simple little question I'd like to put

to you. Will you pay your men one penny more than they force you to pay them? [WILDER *is silent.*

WANKLIN [*chiming in*]. I humbly thought that not to pay more than was necessary was the ABC of commerce.

HARNESS [*with irony*]. Yes, that seems to be the ABC of commerce, sir; and the ABC of commerce is between your interests and the men's.

SCANTLEBURY [*whispering*]. We ought to arrange something.

HARNESS [*drily*]. Am I to understand, then, gentlemen, that your Board is going to make no concessions?

[WANKLIN *and* WILDER *bend forward as if to speak, but stop.*

ANTHONY [*nodding*]. None.

[WANKLIN *and* WILDER *again bend forward, and* SCANTLEBURY *gives an unexpected grunt.*

HARNESS. You were about to say something, I believe?

[*But* SCANTLEBURY *says nothing.*

EDGAR [*looking up suddenly*]. We're sorry for the state of the men.

HARNESS [*icily*]. The men have no use for your pity, sir. What they want is justice.

ANTHONY. Then let *them* be just.

HARNESS. For that word "just" read "humble," Mr Anthony. Why should they be humble? Barring the accident of money, aren't they as good men as you?

ANTHONY. Cant!

HARNESS. Well, I've been five years in America. It colours a man's notions.

SCANTLEBURY [*suddenly, as though avenging his uncompleted grunt*]. Let's have the men in and hear what they've got to say!

[ANTHONY *nods, and* UNDERWOOD *goes out by the single door.*

HARNESS [*drily*]. As I'm to have an interview with them this afternoon, gentlemen, I'll ask you to postpone your final decision till that's over. [*Again* ANTHONY *nods, and taking up his glass drinks.*

[UNDERWOOD *comes in again, followed by* ROBERTS, GREEN, BULGIN, THOMAS, ROUS. *They file in, hat in hand, and stand silent in a row.* ROBERTS *is lean, of middle height, with a slight stoop. He has a little rat-gnawn, brown-grey beard, moustaches, high cheek-bones, hollow cheeks, small fiery eyes. He wears an old and grease-stained blue serge suit, and carries an old bowler hat. He stands nearest the Chairman.* GREEN, *next to him, has a clean, worn face, with a small grey, goatee beard and drooping moustaches, iron spectacles, and mild, straightforward eyes. He wears an overcoat, green with age, and a linen collar. Next to him is* BULGIN, *a tall, strong man, with a dark moustache, and fighting jaw, wearing a red muffler, who keeps changing*

*his cap from one hand to the other. Next to him is* THOMAS, *an old man with a grey moustache, full beard, and weather-beaten, bony face, whose overcoat discloses a lean, plucked-looking neck. On his right* ROUS, *the youngest of the five, looks like a soldier; he has a glitter in his eyes.*

UNDERWOOD [*pointing*]. There are some chairs there against the wall, Roberts; won't you draw them up and sit down?

ROBERTS. Thank you, Mr Underwood, we'll stand—in the presence of the Board. [*He speaks in a biting and staccato voice, rolling his r's, pronouncing his a's like an Italian a, and his consonants short and crisp.*] How are you, Mr Harness? Didn't expect t' have the pleasure of seeing you till this afternoon.

HARNESS [*steadily*]. We shall meet again then, Roberts.

ROBERTS. Glad to hear that; we shall have some news for you to take to your people.

ANTHONY. What do the men want?

ROBERTS [*acidly*]. Beg pardon, I don't quite catch the Chairman's remark.

TENCH [*from behind the Chairman's chair*]. The Chairman wishes to know what the men have to say.

ROBERTS. It's what the Board has to say we've come to hear. It's for the Board to speak first.

ANTHONY. The Board has nothing to say.

ROBERTS [*looking along the line of men*]. In that case we're wasting the Directors' time. We'll be taking our feet off this pretty carpet.

[*He turns, the men move slowly, as though hypnotically influenced.*

WANKLIN [*suavely*]. Come, Roberts, you didn't give us this long cold journey for the pleasure of saying that.

THOMAS [*a pure Welshman*]. No, sir, an' what I say iss——

ROBERTS [*bitingly*]. Go on, Henry Thomas, go on. You're better able to speak to the—Directors than me. [THOMAS *is silent.*

TENCH. The Chairman means, Roberts, that it was the men who asked for the Conference, the Board wish to hear what they have to say.

ROBERTS. Gad! If I was to begin to tell ye all they have to say, I wouldn't be finished to-day. And there'd be some that'd wish they'd never left their London palaces.

HARNESS. What's your proposition, man? Be reasonable.

ROBERTS. You want reason, Mr Harness? Take a look round this afternoon before the meeting. [*He looks at the men; no sound escapes them.*] You'll see some very pretty scenery.

HARNESS. All right, my friend; you won't put me off.

ROBERTS [*to the men*]. We shan't put Mr Harness off. Have some champagne with your lunch, Mr Harness; you'll want it, sir.

HARNESS. Come, get to business, man!

THOMAS. What we're asking, look you, is just simple justice.

ROBERTS [*venomously*]. Justice from London? What are you talking about, Henry Thomas? Have you gone silly? [THOMAS *is silent.*] We know very well what we are—discontented dogs—never satisfied. What did the Chairman tell me up in London? That I didn't know what I was talking about. I was a foolish, uneducated man, that knew nothing of the wants of the men I spoke for.

EDGAR. Do please keep to the point.

ANTHONY [*holding up his hand*]. There can only be one master, Roberts.

ROBERTS. Then, be Gad, it'll be us.

[*There is a silence;* ANTHONY *and* ROBERTS *stare at one another.*

UNDERWOOD. If you've nothing to say to the Directors, Roberts, perhaps you'll let Green or Thomas speak for the men.

[GREEN *and* THOMAS *look anxiously at* ROBERTS, *at each other, and the other men.*

GREEN [*an Englishman*]. If I'd been listened to, gentlemen——

THOMAS. What I'fe got to say iss what we'fe all got to say——

ROBERTS. Speak for yourself, Henry Thomas.

SCANTLEBURY [*with a gesture of deep spiritual discomfort*]. Let the poor men call their souls their own!

ROBERTS. Aye, they shall keep their souls, for it's not much body that you've left them, Mr [*with biting emphasis, as though the word were an offence*] Scantlebury! [*To the men*] Well, will you speak, or shall I speak for you?

ROUS [*suddenly*]. Speak out, Roberts, or leave it to others.

ROBERTS [*ironically*]. Thank you, George Rous. [*Addressing himself to* ANTHONY] The Chairman and Board of Directors have honoured us by leaving London and coming all this way to hear what we've got to say; it would not be polite to keep them any longer waiting.

WILDER. Well, thank God for that!

ROBERTS. Ye will not dare to thank Him when I have done, Mr Wilder, for all your piety. May be your God up in London has no time to listen to the working man. I'm told He is a wealthy God; but if He listens to what I tell Him, He will know more than ever He learned in Kensington.

HARNESS. Come, Roberts, you have your own God. Respect the God of other men.

ROBERTS. That's right, sir. We have another God down here; I doubt He is rather different to Mr Wilder's. Ask Henry Thomas; he will tell you whether his God and Mr Wilder's are the same.

[THOMAS *lifts his hand, and cranes his head as though to prophesy.*

WANKLIN. For goodness' sake, let's keep to the point, Roberts.

ROBERTS. I rather think it is the point, Mr Wanklin. If you can get

the God of Capital to walk through the streets of Labour, and pay attention to what he sees, you're a brighter man than I take you for, for all that you're a Radical.

ANTHONY. Attend to me, Roberts! [ROBERTS *is silent.*] You are here to speak for the men, as I am here to speak for the Board.

[*He looks slowly round.*

[WILDER, WANKLIN, *and* SCANTLEBURY *make movements of uneasiness, and* EDGAR *gazes at the floor. A faint smile comes on* HARNESS'S *face.*

Now, then, what is it?

ROBERTS. Right, sir!

[*Throughout all that follows, he and* ANTHONY *look fixedly upon each other. Men and Directors show in their various ways suppressed uneasiness, as though listening to words that they themselves would not have spoken.*

The men can't afford to travel up to London; and they don't trust you to believe what they say in black and white. They know what the post is [*he darts a look at* UNDERWOOD *and* TENCH], and what Directors' meetings are: "Refer it to the Manager—let the Manager advise us on the men's condition. Can we squeeze them a little more?"

UNDERWOOD [*in a low voice*]. Don't hit below the belt, Roberts!

ROBERTS. Is it below the belt, Mr Underwood? The men know. When I came up to London I told you the position straight. An' what came of it? I was told I didn't know what I was talkin' about. I can't afford to travel up to London to be told that again.

ANTHONY. What have you to say for the men?

ROBERTS. I have this to say—and first as to their condition. Ye shall 'ave no need to go and ask your manager. Ye can't squeeze them any more. Every man of us is well-nigh starving. [*A surprised murmur rises from the men.* ROBERTS *looks round.*] Ye wonder why I tell ye that? Every man of us is going short. We can't be no worse off than we've been these weeks past. Ye needn't think that by waiting ye'll drive us to come in. We'll die first, the whole lot of us. The men have sent for ye to know, once and for all, whether ye are going to grant them their demands. I see the sheet of paper in the Secretary's hand. [TENCH *moves nervously.*] That's it, I think, Mr Tench. It's not very large.

TENCH [*nodding*]. Yes.

ROBERTS. There's not one sentence of writing on that paper that we can do without. [*A movement amongst the men.* ROBERTS *turns on them sharply.*] Isn't that so? [*The men assent reluctantly.* ANTHONY *takes from* TENCH *the paper and peruses it.*] Not one single sentence. All those demands are fair. We have not asked anything that we are not entitled to ask. What I said up in London, I say again now:

there is not anything on that piece of paper that a just man should not ask, and a just man give. [*A pause.*

ANTHONY. There is not one single demand on this paper that we will grant.

[*In the stir that follows on these words* ROBERTS *watches the Directors and* ANTHONY *the men.* WILDER *gets up abruptly and goes over to the fire.*

ROBERTS. D'ye mean that?

ANTHONY. I do.

[WILDER *at the fire makes an emphatic movement of disgust.*

ROBERTS [*noting it, with dry intensity*]. Ye best know whether the condition of the Company is any better than the condition of the men. [*Scanning the Directors' faces*] Ye best know whether ye can afford your tyranny—but this I tell ye: If ye think the men will give way the least part of an inch, ye're making the worst mistake ye ever made. [*He fixes his eyes on* SCANTLEBURY.] Ye think because the Union is not supporting us—more shame to it!—that we'll be coming on our knees to you one fine morning. Ye think because the men have got their wives an' families to think of—that it's just a question of a week or two——

ANTHONY. It would be better if you did not speculate so much on what we think.

ROBERTS. Aye! It's not much profit to us! I will say this for you, Mr Anthony—ye know your own mind! [*Staring at* ANTHONY] I can reckon on ye!

ANTHONY [*ironically*]. I am obliged to you!

ROBERTS. And I know mine. I tell ye this. The men will send their wives and families where the country will have to keep them; an' they will starve sooner than give way. I advise ye, Mr Anthony, to prepare yourself for the worst that can happen to your company. We are not so ignorant as you might suppose. We know the way the cat is jumping. Your position is not all that it might be—not exactly!

ANTHONY. Be good enough to allow us to judge of our position for ourselves. Go back, and reconsider your own.

ROBERTS [*stepping forward*]. Mr Anthony, you are not a young man now; from the time that I remember anything ye have been an enemy to every man that has come into your works. I don't say that ye're a mean man, or a cruel man, but ye've grudged them the say of any word in their own fate. Ye've fought them down four times. I've heard ye say ye love a fight—mark my words—ye're fighting the last fight ye'll ever fight—— [TENCH *touches* ROBERTS' *sleeve.*

UNDERWOOD. Roberts! Roberts!

ROBERTS. Roberts! Roberts! I mustn't speak my mind to the Chairman, but the Chairman may speak his mind to me!

WILDER. What are things coming to?

ANTHONY [*with a grim smile at* WILDER]. Go on, Roberts; say what you like!

ROBERTS [*after a pause*]. I have no more to say.

ANTHONY. The meeting stands adjourned to five o'clock.

WANKLIN [*in a low voice to* UNDERWOOD]. We shall never settle anything like this.

ROBERTS [*bitingly*]. We thank the Chairman and Board of Directors for their gracious hearing.

[*He moves towards the door; the men cluster together stupefied; then* ROUS, *throwing up his head, passes* ROBERTS *and goes out. The others follow.*

ROBERTS [*with his hand on the door—maliciously*]. Good day, gentlemen! [*He goes out.*

HARNESS [*ironically*]. I congratulate you on the conciliatory spirit that's been displayed. With your permission, gentlemen, I'll be with you again at half-past five. Good morning!

[*He bows slightly, rests his eyes on* ANTHONY, *who returns his stare unmoved, and, followed by* UNDERWOOD, *goes out. There is a moment of uneasy silence.* UNDERWOOD *reappears in the doorway.*

WILDER [*with emphatic disgust*]. Well! [*The double doors are opened.*

ENID [*standing in the doorway*]. Lunch is ready.

[EDGAR, *getting up abruptly, walks out past his sister.*

WILDER. Coming to lunch, Scantlebury?

SCANTLEBURY [*rising heavily*]. I suppose so, I suppose so. It's the only thing we can do. [*They go out through the double doors.*

WANKLIN [*in a low voice*]. Do you really mean to fight to a finish, Chairman? [ANTHONY *nods.*

WANKLIN. Take care! The essence of things is to know when to stop. [ANTHONY *does not answer.*

WANKLIN [*very gravely*]. This way disaster lies. The ancient Trojans were fools to your father, Mrs Underwood.

[*He goes out through the double doors.*

ENID. I want to speak to Father, Frank.

[UNDERWOOD *follows* WANKLIN *out.* TENCH, *passing round the table, is restoring order to the scattered pens and papers.*

ENID. Aren't you coming, Dad?

[ANTHONY *shakes his head.* ENID *looks meaningly at* TENCH.

ENID. Won't you go and have some lunch, Mr Tench?

TENCH [*with papers in his hand*]. Thank you, ma'am, thank you! [*He goes slowly, looking back.*

ENID [*shutting the doors*]. I *do* hope it's settled, Father!

ANTHONY. No!

ENID [*very disappointed*]. Oh! Haven't you done anything?

[ANTHONY *shakes his head.*

ENID. Frank says they all want to come to a compromise, really, except that man Roberts.

ANTHONY. *I* don't.

ENID. It's such a horrid position for us. If you were the wife of the Manager, and lived down here, and saw it all. You can't realize, Dad!

ANTHONY. Indeed?

ENID. We see *all* the distress. You remember my maid Annie, who married Roberts? [ANTHONY *nods.*] It's so wretched, her heart's weak; since the strike began she hasn't even been getting proper food. I know it for a fact, Father.

ANTHONY. Give her what she wants, poor woman!

ENID. Roberts won't let her take anything from *us*.

ANTHONY [*staring before him*]. I can't be answerable for the men's obstinacy.

ENID. They're all suffering. Father! Do stop it, for my sake!

ANTHONY [*with a keen look at her*]. You don't understand, my dear.

ENID. If I were on the Board, I'd do something.

ANTHONY. What would you do?

ENID. It's because you can't bear to give way. It's so———

ANTHONY. Well?

ENID. So unnecessary.

ANTHONY. What do *you* know about necessity? Read your novels, play your music, talk your talk, but don't try and tell *me* what's at the bottom of a struggle like this.

ENID. I live down here, and see it.

ANTHONY. What d'you imagine stands between you and your class and these men that you're so sorry for?

ENID [*coldly*]. I don't know what you mean, Father.

ANTHONY. In a few years you and your children would be down in the condition they're in, but for those who have the eyes to see things as they are and the backbone to stand up for themselves.

ENID. You don't know the state the men are in.

ANTHONY. I know it well enough.

ENID. You don't, Father; if you did, you wouldn't——

ANTHONY. It's you who don't know the simple facts of the position. What sort of mercy do you suppose you'd get if no one stood between you and the continual demands of labour? This sort of mercy. [*He puts his hand up to his throat and squeezes it.*] First would go your sentiments, my dear; then your culture, and your comforts would be going all the time!

ENID. I don't believe in barriers between classes.

ANTHONY. You—don't—believe—in—barriers—between the classes?

ENID [*coldly*]. And I don't know what that has to do with this question.

ANTHONY. It will take a generation or two for you to understand.

ENID. It's only you and Roberts, Father, and you know it! [ANTHONY *thrusts out his lower lip.*] It'll ruin the Company.

ANTHONY. Allow me to judge of that.

ENID [*resentfully*]. I won't stand by and let poor Annie Roberts suffer like this! And think of the children, Father! I warn you.

ANTHONY [*with a grim smile*]. What do you propose to do?

ENID. That's my affair. [ANTHONY *only looks at her.*

ENID [*in a changed voice, stroking his sleeve*]. Father, you *know* you oughtn't to have this strain on you—you know what Dr Fisher said!

ANTHONY. No old man can afford to listen to old women.

ENID. But you *have* done enough, even if it really is such a matter of principle with you.

ANTHONY. You think so?

ENID. Don't, Dad! [*Her face works.*] You—you might think of *us*!

ANTHONY. I am.

ENID. It'll break you down.

ANTHONY [*slowly*]. My dear, I am not going to funk; you may rely on that.

[*Re-enter* TENCH *with papers; he glances at them, then plucking up courage.*

TENCH. Beg pardon, madam, I think I'd rather see these papers were disposed of before I get my lunch.

[ENID, *after an impatient glance at him, looks at her father, turns suddenly, and goes into the drawing-room.*

TENCH [*holding the papers and a pen to* ANTHONY, *very nervously*]. Would you sign these for me, please, sir?

[ANTHONY *takes the pen and signs.*

TENCH [*standing with a sheet of blotting-paper behind* EDGAR'S *chair, begins speaking nervously*]. I owe my position to you, sir.

ANTHONY. Well?

TENCH. I'm obliged to see everything that's going on, sir; I—I depend upon the Company entirely. If anything were to happen to it, it'd be disastrous for me. [ANTHONY *nods.*] And, of course, my wife's just had another; and so it makes me doubly anxious just now. And the rates are really terrible down our way.

ANTHONY [*with grim amusement*]. Not more terrible than they are up mine.

TENCH. No, sir? [*Very nervously*] I know the Company means a great deal to you, sir.

ANTHONY. It does; I founded it.

TENCH. Yes, sir. If the strike goes on it'll be very serious. I think the Directors are beginning to realize that, sir.

ANTHONY [*ironically*]. Indeed?

TENCH. I know you hold very strong views, sir, and it's always your habit to look things in the face; but I don't think the Directors—like it, sir, now they—they see it.

ANTHONY [*grimly*]. Nor you, it seems.

TENCH [*with the ghost of a smile*]. No, sir; of course I've got my children, and my wife's delicate; in my position I *have* to think of these things. [ANTHONY *nods.*] It wasn't *that* I was going to say, sir, if you'll excuse me [*hesitates*]——

ANTHONY. Out with it, then!

TENCH. I know—from my own father, sir, that when you get on in life you do feel things dreadfully——

ANTHONY [*almost paternally*]. Come, out with it, Tench!

TENCH. I don't *like* to say it, sir.

ANTHONY [*stonily*]. You must.

TENCH [*after a pause, desperately bolting it out*]. I think the Directors are going to throw you over, sir.

ANTHONY [*sits in silence*]. Ring the bell!

[TENCH *nervously rings the bell and stands by the fire.*

TENCH. Excuse me saying such a thing. I was *only* thinking of you, sir.

[FROST *enters from the hall, he comes to the foot of the table, and looks at* ANTHONY; TENCH *covers his nervousness by arranging papers.*

ANTHONY. Bring me a whisky-and-soda.

FROST. Anything to eat, sir?

[ANTHONY *shakes his head*—FROST *goes to the sideboard, and prepares the drink.*

TENCH [*in a low voice, almost supplicating*]. If you *could* see your way, sir, it would be a great relief to my mind, it would indeed. [*He looks up at* ANTHONY, *who has not moved.*] It does make me so very anxious. I haven't slept properly for weeks, sir, and that's a fact.

[ANTHONY *looks in his face, then slowly shakes his head.*

TENCH [*disheartened*]. No, sir?

[*He goes on arranging papers.* FROST *places the whisky-and-soda on a salver and puts it down by* ANTHONY'S *right hand. He stands away, looking gravely at* ANTHONY.

FROST. *Nothing* I can get you, sir? [ANTHONY *shakes his head.* You're aware, sir, of what the doctor said, sir?

ANTHONY. I am.

[*A pause* FROST *suddenly moves closer to him, and speaks in a low voice.*

FROST. This strike, sir; puttin' all this strain on you. Excuse me, sir, is it—is it worth it, sir? [ANTHONY *mutters some words that are inaudible.*] Very good, sir!

[*He turns and goes out into the hall*—TENCH *makes two attempts to speak; but meeting his Chairman's gaze he drops his eyes, and, turning dismally, he too goes out.* ANTHONY *is left alone. He grips the glass, tilts it, and drinks deeply; then sets it down with a deep and rumbling sigh, and leans back in his chair.*

## ACT II

### SCENE I

*It is half-past three. In the kitchen of* ROBERTS' *cottage a meagre little fire is burning. The room is clean and tidy, very barely furnished, with a brick floor and whitewashed walls, much stained with smoke. There is a kettle on the fire. A door opposite the fireplace opens inwards from a snowy street. On the wooden table are a cup and saucer, a teapot, knife, and plate of bread and cheese. Close to the fireplace in an old armchair, wrapped in a rug, sits* MRS ROBERTS, *a thin and dark-haired woman about thirty-five, with patient eyes. Her hair is not done up, but tied back with a piece of ribbon. By the fire, too, is* MRS YEO, *a red-haired, broad-faced person. Sitting near the table is* MRS ROUS, *an old lady, ashen-white, with silver hair; by the door, standing, as if about to go, is* MRS BULGIN, *a little pale, pinched-up woman. In a chair, with her elbows resting on the table, and her face resting in her hands, sits* MADGE THOMAS, *a good-looking girl of twenty-two, with high cheekbones, deep-set eyes, and dark, untidy hair. She is listening to the talk, but she neither speaks nor moves.*

MRS YEO. So he give me a sixpence, and that's the first bit o' money *I* seen this week. There aint much 'eat to this fire. Come and warm yerself, Mrs Rous, you're lookin' as white as the snow, you are.

MRS ROUS [*shivering—placidly*]. Ah! but the winter my old man was took was the proper winter. Seventy-nine that was, when none of you was hardly born—not Madge Thomas, nor Sue Bulgin. [*Looking at them in turn.*] Annie Roberts, 'ow old were you, dear?

MRS ROBERTS. Seven, Mrs Rous.

MRS ROUS. Seven—well ther'! A tiny little thing!

MRS YEO [*aggressively*]. Well, I was ten myself, *I* remembers it.

MRS ROUS [*placidly*]. The Company hadn't been started three years. Father was workin' on the acid, that's 'ow he got 'is pisoned leg. I kep' sayin' to 'im, "Father, you've got a pisoned leg." "Well," 'e said, "Mother, pison or no pison, I can't afford to go a-layin' up." An' two days after he was on 'is back, and never got up again. It was Providence! There wasn't none o' these Compension Acts then.

MRS YEO. Ye hadn't no strike that winter! [*With grim humour*] This winter's 'ard enough for me. Mrs Roberts, you don't want no 'arder winter, do you? Wouldn't seem natural to 'ave a dinner, would it, Mrs Bulgin?

MRS BULGIN. We've had bread and tea last four days.

MRS YEO. You got that Friday's laundry job?

MRS BULGIN [*dispiritedly*]. They said they'd give it me, but when I went last Friday they were full up. I got to go again next week.

MRS YEO. Ah! There's too many after that. I send Yeo out on the ice to put on the gentry's skates an' pick up what 'e can. Stops 'im from broodin' about the 'ouse.

MRS BULGIN [*in a desolate, matter-of-fact voice*]. Leavin' out the men —it's bad enough with the children. I keep 'em in bed, they don't get so hungry when they're not running about; but they're that restless in bed they worry your life out.

MRS YEO. You're lucky they're all so small. It's the goin' to school that makes 'em 'ungry. Don't Bulgin give you *any*thin'?

MRS BULGIN [*shakes her head, then, as though by afterthought*]. Would if he could, I s'pose.

MRS YEO [*sardonically*]. What! 'Aven't 'e got no shares in the Company?

MRS ROUS [*rising with tremulous cheerfulness*]. Well, good-bye, Annie Roberts, I'm going along home.

MRS ROBERTS. Stay an' have a cup of tea, Mrs Rous?

MRS ROUS [*with the faintest smile*]. Roberts'll want 'is tea when he comes in. I'll just go an' get to bed; it's warmer there than anywhere.

[*She moves very shakily towards the door.*

MRS YEO [*rising and giving her an arm*]. Come on, Mother, take my arm; we're all goin' the same way.

MRS ROUS [*taking the arm*]. Thank you, my dearies!

[*They go out, followed by* MRS BULGIN.

MADGE [*moving for the first time*]. There, Annie, you see that! I told George Rous, "Don't think to have my company till you've made an end of all this trouble. You ought to be ashamed," I said, "with your own mother looking like a ghost, and not a stick to put on the fire. So long as you're able to fill your pipes, you'll let us starve." "I'll take my oath, Madge," he said, "I've not had smoke nor drink these three weeks!" "Well, then, why do you go on with it?" "I

can't go back on Roberts!" . . . That's it! Roberts, always Roberts! They'd all drop it but for him. When *he* talks it's the devil that comes into them. [*A silence.* MRS ROBERTS *makes a movement of pain.*] Ah! *You* don't want him beaten! He's your man. With everybody like their own shadows! [*She makes a gesture towards* MRS ROBERTS.] If Rous wants me he must give up Roberts. If *he* gave him up—they all would. They're only waiting for a lead. Father's against him—they're all against him in their hearts.

MRS ROBERTS. You won't beat Roberts!

[*They look silently at each other.*

MADGE. Won't I? The cowards—when their own mothers and their own children don't know where to turn.

MRS ROBERTS. Madge!

MADGE [*looking searchingly at* MRS ROBERTS]. I wonder he can look *you* in the face. [*She squats before the fire, with her hands out to the flame.*] Harness is here again. They'll have to make up their minds to-day.

MRS ROBERTS [*in a soft, slow voice, with a slight West-Country burr*]. Roberts will never give up the furnacemen and engineers. 'Twouldn't be right.

MADGE. You can't deceive me. It's just his pride.

[*A tapping at the door is heard, the women turn as* ENID *enters. She wears a round fur cap, and a jacket of squirrel's fur. She closes the door behind her.*

ENID. Can I come in, Annie?

MRS ROBERTS [*flinching*]. Miss Enid! Give Mrs Underwood a chair, Madge! [MADGE *gives* ENID *the chair she has been sitting on.*

ENID. Thank you! [*To* MRS ROBERTS] Are you any better?

MRS ROBERTS. Yes, m'm; thank you, m'm.

ENID [*looking at the sullen* MADGE *as though requesting her departure*]. Why did you send back the jelly? I call that really wicked of you!

MRS ROBERTS. Thank you, m'm, I'd no need for it.

ENID. Of course! It was Roberts' doing, wasn't it? How can he let all this suffering go on amongst you?

MADGE [*suddenly*]. What suffering?

ENID [*surprised*]. I beg your pardon!

MADGE. Who said there was suffering?

MRS ROBERTS. Madge!

MADGE [*throwing her shawl over her head*]. Please to let us keep ourselves to ourselves. We don't want you coming here and spying on us.

ENID [*confronting her, but without rising*]. I didn't speak to *you*.

MADGE [*in a low, fierce voice*]. Keep your kind feelings to yourself. You think you can come amongst us, but you're mistaken. Go back and tell the Manager that.

ENID [*stonily*]. This is not your house.

MADGE [*turning to the door*]. No, it is not my house; keep clear of my house, Mrs Underwood.

[*She goes out.* ENID *taps her fingers on the table.*

MRS ROBERTS. Please to forgive Madge Thomas, m'm; she's a bit upset to-day. [*A pause.*

ENID [*looking at her*]. Oh, I think they're so *stupid*, all of them.

MRS ROBERTS [*with a faint smile*]. Yes, m'm.

ENID. Is Roberts out?

MRS ROBERTS. Yes, m'm.

ENID. It is *his doing*, that they don't come to an agreement. Now isn't it, Annie?

MRS ROBERTS [*softly, with her eyes on* ENID, *and moving the fingers of one hand continually on her breast*]. They do say that your father, m'm——

ENID. My father's getting an old man, and you know what old men are.

MRS ROBERTS. I am sorry, m'm.

ENID [*more softly*]. I don't expect *you* to feel sorry, Annie. I know it's his fault as well as Roberts'.

MRS ROBERTS. I'm sorry for anyone that gets old, m'm; it's dreadful to get old, and Mr Anthony was such a fine old man I always used to think.

ENID [*impulsively*]. He always liked you, don't you remember? Look here, Annie, what can I do? I do so want to know. You don't get what you ought to have. [*Going to the fire, she takes the kettle off and looks for coals.*] And you're so naughty, sending back the soup and things!

MRS ROBERTS [*with a faint smile*]. Yes, m'm?

ENID [*resentfully*]. Why, you haven't even got coals?

MRS ROBERTS. If you please, m'm, to put the kettle on again; Roberts won't have long for his tea when he comes in. He's got to meet the men at four.

ENID [*putting the kettle on*]. That means he'll lash them into a fury again. Can't you stop his going, Annie? [MRS ROBERTS *smiles ironically.*] Have you tried? [*A silence.*] Does he know how ill you are?

MRS ROBERTS. It's only my weak 'eart, m'm.

ENID. You used to be so well when you were with us.

MRS ROBERTS [*stiffening*]. Roberts is always good to me.

ENID. But you ought to have everything you want, and you have nothing!

MRS ROBERTS [*appealingly*]. They tell me I don't look like a dyin' woman?

ENID. Of course you don't; if you could only have proper—— Will you see my doctor if I send him to you? I'm sure he'd do you good.

MRS ROBERTS [*with faint questioning*]. Yes, m'm.

ENID. Madge Thomas oughtn't to come here; she only excites you. As if I didn't know what suffering there is amongst the men! I do feel for them dreadfully, but you know they *have* gone too far.

MRS ROBERTS [*continually moving her fingers*]. They say there's no other way to get better wages, m'm.

ENID [*earnestly*]. But, Annie, that's why the Union won't help them. My husband's very sympathetic with the men, but he says they're not underpaid.

MRS ROBERTS. No, m'm?

ENID. They never think how the Company could go on if we paid the wages they want.

MRS ROBERTS [*with an effort*]. But the dividends having been so big, m'm.

ENID [*taken aback*]. You all seem to think the shareholders are rich men, but they're not—most of them are really no better off than working men. [MRS ROBERTS *smiles*.] They have to keep up appearances.

MRS ROBERTS. Yes, m'm?

ENID. You don't have to pay rates and taxes, and a hundred other things that they do. If the men didn't spend such a lot in drink and betting they'd be quite well off!

MRS ROBERTS. They say, workin' so hard, they must have some pleasure.

ENID. But surely not low pleasure like that.

MRS ROBERTS [*a little resentfully*]. Roberts never touches a drop; and he's never had a bet in his life.

ENID. Oh! but he's not a com—— I mean he's an engineer—a superior man.

MRS ROBERTS. Yes, m'm. Roberts says they've no chance of other pleasures.

ENID [*musing*]. Of course, I know it's hard.

MRS ROBERTS [*with a spice of malice*]. And they say gentlefolk's just as bad.

ENID [*with a smile*]. I go as far as most people, Annie, but you know, yourself, that's nonsense.

MRS ROBERTS [*with painful effort*]. A lot o' the men never go near the public; but even they don't save but very little, and that goes if there's illness.

ENID. But they've got their clubs, haven't they?

MRS ROBERTS. The clubs only give up to eighteen shillin's a week, m'm, and it's not much amongst a family. Roberts says workin' folk

have always lived from hand to mouth. Sixpence to-day is worth more than a shillin' to-morrow, that's what they say.

ENID. But that's the spirit of gambling.

MRS ROBERTS [*with a sort of excitement*]. Roberts says a working man's life is all a gamble, from the time 'e's born to the time 'e dies. [ENID *leans forward, interested.* MRS ROBERTS *goes on with a growing excitement that culminates in the personal feeling of the last words.*] He says, m'm, that when a working man's baby is born, it's a toss-up from breath to breath whether it ever draws another, and so on all 'is life; an' when he comes to be old, it's the workhouse or the grave. He says that without a man is very near, and pinches and stints 'imself and 'is children to save, there can't be neither surplus nor security. That's why he wouldn't have no children [*she sinks back*], not though I *wanted* them.

ENID. Yes, yes, I know!

MRS ROBERTS. No, you don't, m'm. You've got your children, and you'll never need to trouble for them.

ENID [*gently*]. You oughtn't to be talking so much, Annie. [*Then, in spite of herself*] But Roberts was paid a lot of money, wasn't he, for discovering that process?

MRS ROBERTS [*on the defensive*]. All Roberts' savin's have gone. He's always looked forward to this strike. He says he's no right to a farthing when the others are suffering. 'Tisn't so with all o' them! Some don't seem to care no more than that—so long as they get their own.

ENID. I don't see how they can be expected to when they're suffering like this. [*In a changed voice*] But Roberts ought to think of *you*! It's all terrible! The kettle's boiling. Shall I make the tea? [*She takes the teapot, and, seeing tea there, pours water into it.*] Won't you have a cup?

MRS ROBERTS. No, thank you, m'm. [*She is listening, as though for footsteps.*] I'd sooner you didn't see Roberts, m'm, he gets so wild.

ENID. Oh! but I must, Annie; I'll be quite calm, I promise.

MRS ROBERTS. It's life an' death to him, m'm.

ENID [*very gently*]. I'll get him to talk to me outside, we won't excite you.

MRS ROBERTS [*faintly*]. No, m'm.

[*She gives a violent start.* ROBERTS *has come in, unseen.*

ROBERTS [*removing his hat—with subtle mockery*]. Beg pardon for coming in; you're engaged with a lady, I see.

ENID. Can I speak to you, Mr Roberts?

ROBERTS. Whom have I the pleasure of addressing, ma'am?

ENID. But surely you know me! I'm Mrs Underwood.

ROBERTS [*with a bow of malice*]. The daughter of our Chairman.

ENID [*earnestly*]. I've come on purpose to speak to you; will you come outside a minute? [*She looks at* MRS ROBERTS.

ROBERTS [*hanging up his hat*]. I have nothing to say, ma'am.

ENID. But I *must* speak to you, please. [*She moves towards the door.*

ROBERTS [*with sudden venom*]. I have not the time to listen!

MRS ROBERTS. David!

ENID. Mr Roberts, *please*!

ROBERTS [*taking off his overcoat*]. I am sorry to disoblige a lady—Mr Anthony's daughter.

ENID [*wavering, then with sudden decision*]. Mr Roberts, I know you've another meeting of the men. [ROBERTS *bows.*] I came to appeal to you. Please, please try to come to some compromise; give way a little, if it's only for your own sakes!

ROBERTS [*speaking to himself*]. The daughter of Mr Anthony begs me to give way a little, if it's only for our own sakes.

ENID. For everybody's sake; for your wife's sake.

ROBERTS. For my wife's sake, for everybody's sake—for the sake of Mr Anthony.

ENID. Why are you so bitter against my father? He has never done anything to you.

ROBERTS. Has he not?

ENID. He can't help his views, any more than you can help yours.

ROBERTS. I really didn't know that I had a right to views!

ENID. He's an old man, and you——

[*Seeing his eyes fixed on her, she stops.*

ROBERTS [*without raising his voice*]. If I saw Mr Anthony going to die, and I could save him by lifting my hand, I would not lift the little finger of it.

ENID. You—you—— [*She stops again, biting her lips.*

ROBERTS. I would not, and that's flat!

ENID [*coldly*]. You don't mean what you say, and you know it!

ROBERTS. I mean every word of it.

ENID. But why?

ROBERTS [*with a flash*]. Mr Anthony stands for tyranny! That's why!

ENID. Nonsense!

[MRS ROBERTS *makes a movement as if to rise, but sinks back in her chair.*

ENID [*with an impetuous movement*]. Annie!

ROBERTS. Please not to touch my wife!

ENID [*recoiling with a sort of horror*]. I believe—you are mad.

ROBERTS. The house of a madman then is not the fit place for a lady.

ENID. I'm not afraid of you.

ROBERTS [*bowing*]. I would not expect the daughter of Mr Anthony to be afraid. Mr Anthony is not a coward like the rest of them.

ENID [*suddenly*]. I suppose you think it brave, then, to go on with this struggle.

ROBERTS. Does Mr Anthony think it brave to fight against women and children? Mr Anthony is a rich man, I believe; does he think it brave to fight against those who haven't a penny? Does he think it brave to set children crying with hunger, an' women shivering with cold?

ENID [*putting up her hand, as though warding off a blow*]. My father is acting on his principles, and you know it!

ROBERTS. And so am I!

ENID. You hate us; and you can't bear to be beaten.

ROBERTS. Neither can Mr Anthony, for all that he may say.

ENID. At any rate, you might have pity on your wife.

[MRS ROBERTS *who has her hand pressed to her heart, takes it away, and tries to calm her breathing.*

ROBERTS. Madam, I have no more to say.

[*He takes up the loaf. There is a knock at the door, and* UNDERWOOD *comes in. He stands looking at them,* ENID *turns to him, then seems undecided.*

UNDERWOOD. Enid!

ROBERTS [*ironically*]. Ye were not needing to come for your wife, Mr Underwood. We are not rowdies.

UNDERWOOD. I know that, Roberts. I hope Mrs Roberts is better. [ROBERTS *turns away without answering.*] Come, Enid!

ENID. I make one more appeal to you, Mr Roberts, for the sake of your wife.

ROBERTS [*with polite malice*]. If I might advise ye, ma'am—make it for the sake of your husband and your father.

[ENID, *suppressing a retort, goes out.* UNDERWOOD *opens the door for her and follows.* ROBERTS, *going to the fire, holds out his hands to the dying glow.*

ROBERTS. How goes it, my girl? Feeling better, are you?

[MRS ROBERTS *smiles faintly. He brings his overcoat and wraps it round her.*

[*Looking at his watch*] Ten minutes to four! [*As though inspired*] I've seen their faces, there's no fight in them, except for that one old robber.

MRS ROBERTS. Won't you stop and eat, David? You've 'ad nothing all day!

ROBERTS [*putting his hand to his throat*]. Can't swallow till those old sharks are out o' the town. [*He walks up and down.*] I shall have a bother with the men—there's no heart in them, the cowards. Blind as bats, they are—can't see a day before their noses.

MRS ROBERTS. It's the women, David.

ROBERTS. Ah! So they say! They can remember the women when their own bellies speak! The women never stops them from the drink;

but from a little suffering to themselves in a sacred cause, the women stop them fast enough.

MRS ROBERTS. But think o' the children, David.

ROBERTS. Ah! If they will go breeding themselves for slaves, without a thought o' the future o' them they breed——

MRS ROBERTS [*gasping*]. That's enough, David; don't begin to talk of that—I won't—I can't——

ROBERTS [*staring at her*]. Now, now, my girl!

MRS ROBERTS [*breathlessly*]. No, no, David—I won't!

ROBERTS. There, there! Come, come! That's right. [*Bitterly*] Not one penny will they put by for a day like this. Not they! Hand to mouth—Gad!—I know them! They've broke my heart. There was no holdin' them at the start, but now the pinch 'as come.

MRS ROBERTS. How can you expect it, David? They're not made of iron.

ROBERTS. Expect it? Wouldn't I expect what I would do meself? Wouldn't I starve an' rot rather than give in? What one man can do, another can.

MRS ROBERTS. And the women?

ROBERTS. This is not women's work.

MRS ROBERTS [*with a flash of malice*]. No, the women may die for all you care. That's their work.

ROBERTS [*averting his eyes*]. Who talks of dying? No one will die till we have beaten these—— [*He meets her eyes again, and again turns his away. Excitedly*] This is what I've been waiting for all these months. To get the old robbers down, and send them home again without a farthin's worth o' change. I've seen their faces, I tell you, in the valley of the shadow of defeat.

[*He goes to the peg and takes down his hat.*

MRS ROBERTS [*following with her eyes—softly*]. Take your overcoat, David; it must be bitter cold.

ROBERTS [*coming up to her—his eyes are furtive*]. No, no! There, there, stay quiet and warm. I won't be long, my girl.

MRS ROBERTS [*with soft bitterness*]. You'd better take it.

[*She lifts the coat. But* ROBERTS *puts it back, and wraps it round her. He tries to meet her eyes, but cannot.* MRS ROBERTS *stays huddled in the coat, her eyes, that follow him about, are half malicious, half yearning. He looks at his watch again, and turns to go. In the doorway he meets* JAN THOMAS, *a boy of ten in clothes too big for him, carrying a penny whistle.*

ROBERTS. Hallo, boy!

[*He goes.* JAN *stops within a yard of* MRS ROBERTS, *and stares at her without a word.*

MRS ROBERTS. Well, Jan!

JAN. Father's coming; sister Madge is coming.

[*He sits at the table, and fidgets with his whistle; he blows three vague notes; then imitates a cuckoo.*

[*There is a tap on the door.* OLD THOMAS *comes in.*

THOMAS. A very coot tay to you, ma'am. It is petter that you are.

MRS ROBERTS. Thank you, Mr Thomas.

THOMAS [*nervously*]. Roberts in?

MRS ROBERTS. Just gone on to the meeting, Mr Thomas.

THOMAS [*with relief, becoming talkative*]. This is fery unfortunate, look you! I came to tell him that we must make terms with London. It is a fery great pity he is gone to the meeting. He will be kicking against the pricks, I am thinking.

MRS ROBERTS [*half rising*]. He'll never give in, Mr Thomas.

THOMAS. You must not be fretting, that is very pat for you. Look you, there iss hartly any mans for supporting him now, but the engineers and George Rous. [*Solemnly*] This strike is no longer coing with Chapel, look you! I have listened carefully, an' I have talked with her. [JAN *blows.*] Sst! I don't care what th' others say, I say that *Chapel means us* to be stopping the trouple, that is what I make of her; and it is my opinion that this is the fery best thing for all of us. If it wasn't my opinion, I ton't say—but it is my opinion, look you.

MRS ROBERTS [*trying to suppress her excitement*]. I don't know what'll come to Roberts, if you give in.

THOMAS. It iss no disgrace whateffer! All that a mortal man coult do he hass tone. It iss against Human Nature he hass gone; fery natural—any man may to that; but Chapel has spoken and he must not co against *her*. [JAN *imitates the cuckoo.*] Ton't make that squeaking! [*Going to the door*] Here iss my taughter come to sit with you. A fery goot day, ma'am—no fretting—rememper!

[MADGE *comes in and stands at the open door, watching the street.*

MADGE. You'll be late, Father; they're beginning. [*She catches him by the sleeve.*] For the love of God, stand up to him, Father—this time!

THOMAS [*detaching his sleeve with dignity*]. Leave me to do what's proper, girl!

[*He goes out.* MADGE, *in the centre of the open doorway, slowly moves in, as though before the approach of some one.*

ROUS [*appearing in the doorway*]. Madge!

[MADGE *stands with her back to* MRS ROBERTS, *staring at him with her head up and her hands behind her.*

ROUS [*who has a fierce distracted look*]. Madge! I'm going to the meeting. [MADGE, *without moving, smiles contemptuously.*] D'ye hear me?

[*They speak in quick low voices.*

MADGE. I hear! Go, and kill your own mother, if you must.

[ROUS *seizes her by both her arms. She stands rigid, with her head bent back. He releases her, and he too stands motionless.*

ROUS. I swore to stand by Roberts. I swore that! Ye want me to go back on what I've sworn.

MADGE [*with slow soft mockery*]. You are a pretty lover!

ROUS. Madge!

MADGE [*smiling*]. I've heard that lovers do what their girls ask them —[JAN *sounds the cuckoo's notes*]—but that's not true, it seems!

ROUS. You'd make a blackleg of me!

MADGE [*with her eyes half closed*]. Do it for me!

ROUS [*dashing his hand across his brow*]. Damn! I can't!

MADGE [*swiftly*]. Do it for me!

ROUS [*through his teeth*]. Don't play the wanton with me!

MADGE [*with a movement of her hand towards* JAN—*quick and low*]. I'd do *that* to get the children bread!

ROUS [*in a fierce whisper*]. Madge! Oh, Madge!

MADGE [*with soft mockery*]. But *you* can't break your word for me!

ROUS [*with a choke*]. Then, Begod, I can! [*He turns and rushes off.*

[MADGE *stands with a faint smile on her face, looking after him. She moves to the table.*

MADGE. I have done for Roberts!

[*She sees that* MRS ROBERTS *has sunk back in her chair.*

MADGE [*running to her, and feeling her hands*]. You're as cold as a stone! You want a drop of brandy. Jan, run to the Lion; say, I sent you for Mrs Roberts.

MRS ROBERTS [*with a feeble movement*]. I'll just sit quiet, Madge. Give Jan—his—tea.

MADGE [*giving* JAN *a slice of bread*]. There, ye little rascal. Hold your piping. [*Going to the fire, she kneels.*] It's going out.

MRS ROBERTS [*with a faint smile*]. 'Tis all the same.

[JAN *begins to blow his whistle.*

MADGE. Tsht! Tsht!—you—— [JAN *stops.*

MRS ROBERTS [*smiling*]. Let 'im play, Madge.

MADGE [*on her knees at the fire, listening*]. Waiting an' waiting. I've no patience with it; waiting an' waiting—that's what a woman has to do! Can you hear them at it—I can!

[*She leans her elbows on the table, and her chin on her hands. Behind her,* MRS ROBERTS *leans forward, with painful and growing excitement, as the sounds of the strikers meeting come in.*

## Scene 2

*It is past four. In a grey, failing light an open muddy space is crowded with workmen. Beyond, divided from it by a barbed-wire fence, is the raised towing-path of a canal, on which is moored a barge. In the distance are marshes and snow-covered hills. The 'Works' high wall runs from the canal across the open space, and in the angle of this wall is a rude platform of barrels and boards. On it* Harness *is standing.* Roberts, *a little apart from the crowd, leans his back against the wall. On the raised towing-path two bargemen lounge and smoke indifferently.*

Harness [*holding out his hand*]. Well, I've spoken to you straight. If I speak till to-morrow I can't say more.

Jago [*a dark, sallow, Spanish-looking man with a short, thin beard*]. Mister, want to ask you! Can they get blacklegs?

Bulgin [*menacing*]. Let 'em try.

[*There are savage murmurs from the crowd.*

Brown [*a round-faced man*]. Where could they get 'em then?

Evans [*a small, restless, harassed man, with a fighting face*]. There's always blacklegs; it's the nature of 'em. There's always men that'll save their own skins.

[*Another savage murmur. There is a movement, and old* Thomas, *joining the crowd, takes his stand in front.*

Harness [*holding up his hand*]. They can't get them. But that won't help you. Now, men, be reasonable. Your demands would have brought on us the burden of a dozen strikes at a time when we were not prepared for them. The Unions live by Justice, not to one, but all. Any fair man will tell you—you were ill-advised! I don't say you go too far for that which you're entitled to, but you're going too far for the moment; you've dug a pit for yourselves. Are you to stay there, or are you to climb out? Come!

Lewis [*a clean-cut Welshman with a dark moustache*]. You've hit it, mister! Which is it to be?

[*Another movement in the crowd, and* Rous, *coming quickly, takes his stand next* Thomas.

Harness. Cut your demands to the right pattern, and we'll see you through; refuse, and don't expect me to waste my time coming down here again. I'm not the sort that speaks at random, as you ought to know by this time. If you're the sound men I take you for—no matter who advises you against it—[*he fixes his eyes on* Roberts]—you'll make up your minds to come in, and trust to us to get your terms. Which is it to be? Hands together, and victory—or—the starvation you've got now? [*A prolonged murmur from the crowd.*

JAGO [*sullenly*]. Talk about what you know.

HARNESS [*lifting his voice above the murmur*]. Know? [*With cold passion*] All that you've been through, my friend, I've been through—I was through it when I was no bigger than [*pointing to a youth*] that shaver there; the Unions then weren't what they are now. What's made them strong? It's hands together that's made them strong. I've been through it all, I tell you, the brand's on my soul yet. I know what you've suffered—there's nothing you can tell me that I don't know; but the whole is greater than the part, and you are only the part. Stand by us, and we will stand by you.

[*Quartering them with his eyes, he waits. The murmuring swells; the men form little groups.* GREEN, BULGIN, *and* LEWIS *talk together.*

LEWIS. Speaks very sensible, the Union chap.

GREEN [*quietly*]. Ah! if I'd a been *listened* to, you'd 'ave 'eard sense these two months past. [*The bargemen are seen laughing.*

LEWIS [*pointing*]. Look at those two blanks over the fence there!

BULGIN [*with gloomy violence*]. They'd best stop their cackle, or I'll break their jaws.

JAGO [*suddenly*]. You say the furnacemen's paid enough?

HARNESS. I did not say they were paid enough; I said they were paid as much as the furnacemen in similar works elsewhere.

EVANS. That's a lie! [*Hubbub.*] What about Harper's?

HARNESS [*with cold irony*]. You may look at home for lies, my man. Harper's shifts are longer, the pay works out the same.

HENRY ROUS [*a dark edition of his brother* GEORGE]. Will ye support us in double pay overtime Saturdays?

HARNESS. Yes, we will.

JAGO. What have ye done with our subscriptions?

HARNESS [*coldly*]. I have told you what we *will* do with them.

EVANS. Ah! *will*, it's always will! Ye'd have our mates desert us.

[*Hubbub.*

BULGIN [*shouting*]. Hold your row! [EVANS *looks round angrily.*

HARNESS [*lifting his voice*]. Those who know their right hands from their lefts know that the Unions are neither thieves nor traitors. I've said my say. Figure it out, my lads; when you want me you know where I shall be.

[*He jumps down, the crowd gives way, he passes through them, and goes away. A bargeman looks after him, jerking his pipe with a derisive gesture. The men close up in groups, and many looks are cast at* ROBERTS, *who stands alone against the wall.*

EVANS. He wants ye to turn blacklegs, that's what he wants. He wants ye to go back on us. Sooner than turn blackleg—I'd starve, I would.

BULGIN. Who's talkin' o' blacklegs—mind what you're saying, will you?

BLACKSMITH [*a youth with yellow hair and huge arms*]. What about the women?

EVANS. They can stand what we can stand, I suppose, can't they?

BLACKSMITH. Ye've no wife?

EVANS. An' don't want one.

THOMAS [*raising his voice*]. Aye! Give us the power to come to terms with London, lads.

DAVIES [*a dark, slow-fly, gloomy man*]. Go up the platform, if you got anything to say, go up an' say it.

[*There are cries of "Thomas!" He is pushed towards the platform; he ascends it with difficulty, and bares his head, waiting for silence. A hush!*

RED-HAIRED YOUTH [*suddenly.*] Coot old Thomas!

[*A hoarse laugh; the bargemen exchange remarks; a hush again, and* THOMAS *begins speaking.*

THOMAS. We are all in the tepth together, and it iss Nature that has put us there.

HENRY ROUS. It's London put us there!

EVANS. It's the Union.

THOMAS. It iss not Lonton; nor it iss not the Union—it iss Nature. It iss no disgrace whateffer to a potty to give in to Nature. For this Nature iss a fery pig thing; it is pigger than what a man is. There iss more years to my hett than to the hett of anyone here. It is fery pat, look you, this coing against Nature. It is pat to make other potties suffer, when there is nothing to pe cot py it. [*A laugh.* THOMAS *angrily goes on.*] What are ye laughing at? It is pat, I say! We are fighting for a principle; there is nopotty that shall say I am not a peliever in principle. Putt when Nature says "No further," then it is no coot snapping your fingers in her face. [*A laugh from* ROBERTS, *and murmurs of approval.*] This Nature must pe humort. It is a man's pisiness to pe pure, honest, just, and merciful. That's what Chapel tells you. [*To* ROBERTS, *angrily*] And, look you, David Roberts, Chapel teils you ye can do that without coing against Nature.

JAGO. What about the Union?

THOMAS. I ton't trust the Union; they haf treated us like dirt. "Do what we tell you," said they. I haf peen captain of the furnace-men twenty years, and I say to the Union—[*excitedly*]—"Can you tell me, then, as well as I can tell you, what iss the right wages for the work that these men do?" For fife and twenty years I haf paid my moneys to the Union and—[*with great excitement*]—for nothings! What iss that but roguery, for all that this Mr Harness says! [*Murmurs.*

EVANS. Hear, hear.

HENRY ROUS. Get on with you! Cut on with it then!

THOMAS. Look you, if a man toes not trust me, am I coing to trust him?

JAGO. That's right.

THOMAS. Let them alone for rogues, and act for ourselves.

[*Murmurs.*

BLACKSMITH. That's what we been doin', haven't we?

THOMAS [*with increased excitement*]. I wass brought up to do for meself. I wass brought up to go without a thing, if I hat not moneys to puy it. There iss too much, look you, of doing things with other people's moneys. We haf fought fair, and if we haf peen peaten, it iss no fault of ours. Gif us the power to make terms with London for ourself; if we ton't succeed, I say it iss petter to take our peating like men, than to tie like togs, or hang on to others' coat-tails to make them do our pisiness for us!

EVANS [*muttering*]. Who wants to?

THOMAS [*craning*]. What's that? If I stand up to a potty, and he knocks me town, I am not to go hollering to other potties to help me; I am to stand up again; and if he knocks me town properly, I am to stay there, isn't that right? [*Laughter.*

JAGO. No Union!

HENRY ROUS. Union! [*Others take up the shout.*

EVANS. Blacklegs!

[BULGIN *and the* BLACKSMITH *shake their fists at* EVANS.

THOMAS [*with a gesture*]. I am an olt man, look you.

[*A sudden silence, then murmurs again.*

LEWIS. Olt fool, with his "No Union!"

BULGIN. Them furnace chaps! For twopence I'd smash the faces o' the lot of them.

GREEN. If I'd 'a been listened to at the first——

THOMAS [*wiping his brow*]. I'm comin' now to what I was coing to say——

DAVIES [*muttering*]. An' time too!

THOMAS [*solemnly*]. Chapel says: Ton't carry on this strife! Put an end to it!

JAGO. That's a lie! Chapel says go on!

THOMAS [*scornfully*]. Inteet! I haf ears to my head.

RED-HAIRED YOUTH. Ah! long ones! [*A laugh.*

JAGO. Your ears have misbeled you then.

THOMAS [*excitedly*]. Ye cannot be right if I am, ye cannot haf it both ways.

RED-HAIRED YOUTH. Chapel can, though!

[*The "shaver" laughs; there are murmurs from the crowd.*

THOMAS [*fixing his eyes on the "shaver"*]. Ah! ye're coing the roat

to tamnation. An' so I say to all of you. If ye co against Chapel I will not pe with you, nor will any other Got-fearing man.

[*He steps down from the platform.* JAGO *makes his way towards it. There are cries of "Don't let 'im go up!"*

JAGO. Don't let him go up? That's free speech, that is. [*He goes up.*] I ain't got much to say to you. Look at the matter plain; ye've come the road this far, and now you want to chuck the journey. We've all been in one boat; and now you want to pull in two. We engineers have stood by you; ye're ready now, are ye, to give us the go-by? If we'd a-known that before, we'd not a-started out with you so early one bright morning! That's all I've got to say. Old man Thomas a'n't got his Bible lesson right. If you give up to London, or to Harness, now, it's givin' us the chuck—to save your skins—you won't get over that, my boys; it's a dirty thing to do.

[*He gets down; during his little speech, which is ironically spoken, there is a restless discomfort in the crowd.* ROUS, *stepping forward, jumps on the platform. He has an air of fierce distraction. Sullen murmurs of disapproval from the crowd.*

ROUS [*speaking with great excitement*]. I'm no blanky orator, mates, but wot I say is drove from me. What I say is yuman nature. Can a man set an' see 'is mother starve? Can 'e now?

ROBERTS [*starting forward*]. Rous!

ROUS [*staring at him fiercely*]. Sim 'Arness said fair! I've changed my mind!

EVANS. Ah! Turned your coat, you mean!

[*The crowd manifests a great surprise.*

LEWIS [*apostrophizing Rous*]. Hallo! What's turned him round?

ROUS [*speaking with intense excitement*]. 'E said fair. "Stand by us," 'e said, "and we'll stand by you." That's where we've been makin' our mistake this long time past; and who's to blame for't? [*He points at* ROBERTS.] That man there! "No," 'e said, "fight the robbers," 'e said, "squeeze the breath out o' them!" But it's not the breath out o' them that's being squeezed; it's the breath out of *us* and *ours*, and that's the book of truth. I'm no orator, mates, it's the flesh and blood in me that's speakin', it's the heart o' me. [*With a menacing, yet half ashamed movement towards* ROBERTS] He'll speak to you again, mark my words, but don't ye listen. [*The crowd groans.*] It's hell-fire that's on that man's tongue. [ROBERTS *is seen laughing.*] Sim 'Arness is right. What are we without the Union—handful o' parched leaves—a puff o' smoke. I'm no orator, but I say, Chuck it up! Chuck it up! Sooner than go on starving the women and the children.

[*The murmurs of acquiescence almost drown the murmurs of dissent.*

EVANS. What's turned *you* to blacklegging?

ROUS [*with a furious look*]. Sim 'Arness knows what he's talkin' about. Give us power to come to terms with London; I'm no orator, but I say—have done wi' this black misery!

[*He gives his muffler a twist, jerks his head back, and jumps off the platform. The crowd applauds and surges forward. Amid cries of "That's enough!" "Up Union!" "Up Harness!" ROBERTS quietly ascends the platform. There is a moment of silence.*

BLACKSMITH. We don't want to hear you. Shut it!

HENRY ROUS. Get down!

[*Amid such cries they surge towards the platform.*

EVANS [*fiercely*]. Let 'im speak! Roberts! Roberts!

BULGIN [*muttering*]. He'd better look out that I don't crack 'is skull.

[ROBERTS *faces the crowd, probing them with his eyes till they gradually become silent. He begins speaking. One of the bargemen rises and stands.*

ROBERTS. You don't want to hear me, then? You'll listen to Rous and to that old man, but not to me. You'll listen to Sim Harness of the Union that's treated you *so fair*; maybe you'll listen to those men from London? Ah! You groan! What for? You love their feet on your necks, don't you? [*Then as* BULGIN *elbows his way towards the platform, with calm pathos*] You'd like to break my jaw, John Bulgin. Let me speak, then do your smashing, if it gives you pleasure. [BULGIN *stands motionless and sullen.*] Am I a liar, a coward, a traitor? If only I were, ye'd listen to me, I'm sure. [*The murmurings cease, and there is now dead silence.*] Is there a man of you here that has less to gain by striking? Is there a man of you that had more to lose? Is there a man of you that has given up *eight hundred* pounds since this trouble here began? Come now, is there? How much has Thomas given up—ten pounds or five, or what? You listened to him, and what had he to say? "None can pretend," he said, "that I'm not a believer in principle—[*with biting irony*]—but when Nature says: 'No further,' 'tes going agenst Nature." *I* tell you if a man cannot say to Nature: "Budge me from this if ye can!"—[*with a sort of exaltation*]—his principles are but his belly. "Oh, but," Thomas says, "a man can be pure and honest, just and merciful, and take off his hat to Nature!" *I* tell you Nature's neither pure nor honest, just nor merciful. You chaps that live over the hill, an' go home dead beat in the dark on a snowy night—don't ye fight your way every inch of it? Do ye go lyin' down an' trustin' to the tender mercies of this merciful Nature? Try it and you'll soon know with what ye've got to deal. 'Tes only by that—[*he strikes a blow with his clenched fist*]—in Nature's face that a man can be a man. "Give in," says Thomas,

"go down on your knees; throw up your foolish fight, an' perhaps," he said, "perhaps your enemy will chuck you down a crust."

JAGO. Never!

EVANS. Curse them!

THOMAS. I nefer said that.

ROBERTS [*bitingly*]. If ye did not say it, ye meant it. An' what did ye say about Chapel? "Chapel's against it," ye said. "She's against it!" Well, if Chapel and Nature go hand in hand, it's the first I've ever heard of it. That young man there—[*pointing to* ROUS]—said I 'ad 'ell-fire on my tongue. If I had I would use it all to scorch and wither this talking of surrender. Surrendering's the work of cowards and traitors.

HENRY ROUS [*as* GEORGE ROUS *moves forward*]. Go for him, George—don't stand his lip!

ROBERTS [*flinging out his finger*]. Stop there, George Rous, it's no time this to settle personal matters. [ROUS *stops.*] But there was one other spoke to you—Mr Simon Harness. We have not much to thank Mr Harness and the Union for. They said to us "Desert your mates, or we'll desert you." An' they did desert us.

EVANS. They did.

ROBERTS. Mr Simon Harness is a clever man, but he has come too late. [*With intense conviction*] For all that Mr Simon Harness says, for all that Thomas, Rous, for all that any man present here can say—*we've won the fight!* [*The crowd sags nearer, looking eagerly up. With withering scorn*] You've felt the pinch o't in your bellies. You've forgotten what that fight 'as been; many times I have told you; I will tell you now this once again. The fight o' the country's body and blood against a blood-sucker. The fight of those that spend theirselves with every blow they strike and every breath they draw, against a thing that fattens on them, and grows and grows by the law of *merciful* Nature. That thing is Capital! A thing that buys the sweat o' men's brows, and the tortures o' their brains, at its own price. *Don't I* know that? Wasn't the work o' *my* brains bought for seven hundred pounds, and hasn't one hundred thousand pounds been gained them by that seven hundred without the stirring of a finger? It is a thing that will take as much and give you as little as it can. That's *Capital*! A thing that will say—"I'm very sorry for you, poor fellows—you have a cruel time of it, I know," but will not give one sixpence of its dividends to help you have a better time. That's Capital! Tell me, for all their talk is there one of them that will consent to another penny on the Income Tax to help the poor? That's Capital! A white-faced, stony-hearted monster! Ye have got it on its knees; are ye to give up at the last minute to save your miserable bodies pain? When I went this morning to those old men from London, I looked into their very

'earts. One of them was sitting there—Mr Scantlebury, a mass of flesh nourished on us: sittin' there for all the world like the shareholders in this Company, that sit not moving tongue nor finger, takin' dividends—a great dumb ox that can only be roused when its food is threatened. I looked into his eyes and I saw *he was afraid*—afraid for himself and his dividends, afraid for his fees, afraid of the very shareholders he stands for; and all but one of them's afraid—like children that get into a wood at night, and start at every rustle of the leaves. I ask you, men—[*he pauses, holding out his hand till there is utter silence*]—give me a free hand to tell them: "Go you back to London. The men have nothing for you!" [*A murmuring.*] Give me that, an' I swear to you, within a week you shall have from London all you want.

EVANS, JAGO, *and others*. A free hand! Give him a free hand! Bravo—bravo!

ROBERTS. 'Tis not for this little moment of time we're fighting [*the murmuring dies*], not for ourselves, our own little bodies, and their wants, 'tis for all those that come after throughout all time. [*With intense sadness*] Oh! men—for the love o' them, don't roll up another stone upon their heads, don't help to blacken the sky, an' let the bitter sea in over them. They're welcome to the worst that can happen to me, to the worst that can happen to us all, aren't they—aren't they? If we can shake [*passionately*] that white-faced monster with the bloody lips, that has sucked the life out of ourselves, our wives, and children, since the world began. [*Dropping the note of passion, but with the utmost weight and intensity*] If we have not the hearts of men to stand against it breast to breast, and eye to eye, and force it backward till it cry for mercy, it will go on sucking life; and we shall stay for ever what we are [*in almost a whisper*], less than the very dogs.

[*An utter stillness, and* ROBERTS *stands rocking his body slightly, with his eyes burning the faces of the crowd.*

EVANS *and* JAGO [*suddenly*]. Roberts! [*The shout is taken up.*

[*There is a slight movement in the crowd, and* MADGE, *passing below the towing-path, stops by the platform, looking up at* ROBERTS. *A sudden doubting silence.*

ROBERTS. "Nature," says that old man, "give in to Nature." *I* tell you, strike your blow in Nature's face—an' let it do its worst!

[*He catches sight of* MADGE, *his brows contract, he looks away.*

MADGE [*in a low voice—close to the platform*]. Your wife's dying!

[ROBERTS *glares at her as if torn from some pinnacle of exaltation.*

ROBERTS [*trying to stammer on*]. I say to you—answer them—answer them—— [*He is drowned by the murmur in the crowd.*

THOMAS [*stepping forward*]. Ton't you hear her, then?

ROBERTS. What is it? [*A dead silence.*

THOMAS. Your wife, man!

[ROBERTS *hesitates, then with a gesture he leaps down, and goes away below the towing-path, the men making way for him. The standing bargeman opens and prepares to light a lantern. Daylight is fast failing.*

MADGE. He needn't have hurried! Annie Roberts is dead. [*Then in the silence, passionately*] You pack of blinded hounds! How many more women are you going to let die?

[*The crowd shrinks back from her, and breaks up in groups, with a confused, uneasy movement.* MADGE *goes quickly away below the towing-path. There is a hush as they look after her.*

LEWIS. There's a spitfire, for ye!

BULGIN [*growling*]. I'll smash 'er jaw.

GREEN. If I'd a-been listened to, that poor woman——

THOMAS. It's a judgment on him for coing against Chapel. I tolt him how 'twould be!

EVANS. All the more reason for sticking by 'im. [*A cheer.*] Are you goin' to desert him now 'e's down? Are you goin' to chuck him over now 'e's lost 'is wife?

[*The crowd is murmuring and cheering all at once.*

ROUS [*stepping in front of platform*]. Lost his wife! Aye! Can't ye see? Look at home, look at your own wives! What's to save them? Ye'll have the same in all your houses before long!

LEWIS. Aye, aye!

HENRY ROUS. Right! George, right! [*There are murmurs of assent.*

ROUS. It's not us that's blind, it's Roberts. How long will ye put up with 'im?

HENRY ROUS, BULGIN, DAVIES. Give 'im the chuck!

[*The cry is taken up.*

EVANS [*fiercely*]. Kick a man that's down? Down?

HENRY ROUS. Stop his jaw there!

[EVANS *throws up his arm at a threat from* BULGIN. *The bargeman, who has lighted the lantern, holds it high above his head.*

ROUS [*springing on to the platform*]. What brought him down, then, but 'is own black obstinacy? Are ye goin' to follow a man that can't see better than that where he's goin'?

EVANS. He's lost 'is wife.

ROUS. An' whose fault's that but his own? 'Ave done with 'im, I say, before he's killed your own wives and mothers.

DAVIES. Down 'im!

HENRY ROUS. He's finished!

BROWN. We've had enough of 'im!

BLACKSMITH. Too much!

[*The crowd takes up these cries, excepting only* EVANS, JAGO,

*and* GREEN, *who is seen to argue mildly with the* BLACK SMITH.

ROUS [*above the hubbub*]. We'll make terms with the Union, lads. [*Cheer*

EVANS [*fiercely*]. Ye blacklegs!

BULGIN [*savagely—squaring up to him*]. Who are ye callin' blacklegs, Rat

[EVANS *throws up his fists, parries the blow, and returns i They fight. The bargemen are seen holding up the lanter and enjoying the sight. Old* THOMAS *steps forward an holds out his hands.*

THOMAS. Shame on your strife!

[*The* BLACKSMITH, BROWN, LEWIS, *and the* RED-HAIRED YOUT *pull* EVANS *and* BULGIN *apart. The stage is almost dar*

## ACT III

*It is five o'clock. In the* UNDERWOODS' *drawing-room, which is artisti cally furnished,* ENID *is sitting on the sofa working at a baby's froc* EDGAR, *by a little spindle-legged table in the centre of the room, fingering a china-box. His eyes are fixed on the double doors tha lead into the dining-room.*

EDGAR [*putting down the china-box and glancing at his watch*]. Jus on five, they're all in there waiting, except Frank. Where's he?

ENID. He's had to go down to Gascoyne's about a contract. Wi you want him?

EDGAR. He can't help us. This is a Directors' job. [*Motionin towards a single door half hidden by a curtain*] Father in his room?

ENID. Yes.

EDGAR. I wish he'd stay there, Enid. [ENID *looks up at him.*] Th is a beastly business, old girl.

[*He takes up the little box again and turns it over and ove*

ENID. I went to the Roberts' this afternoon, Ted.

EDGAR. That wasn't very wise.

ENID. He's simply killing his wife.

EDGAR. We are, you mean.

ENID [*suddenly*]. Roberts *ought* to give way!

EDGAR. There's a lot to be said on the men's side.

ENID. I don't feel half so sympathetic with them as I did before went. They just set up class feeling against you. Poor Annie wa looking dreadfully bad—fire going out, and nothing fit for her to ea

EDGAR *walks to and fro.*] But she would stand up for Roberts. When you see all this wretchedness going on and feel you can do nothing, you have to shut your eyes to the whole thing.

EDGAR. If you can.

ENID. When I went I was all on their side, but as soon as I got here I began to feel quite different at once. People talk about sympathy with the working classes, they don't know what it means to try and put it into practice. It seems hopeless.

EDGAR. Ah! well.

ENID. It's dreadful going on with the men in this state. I do hope the Dad will make concessions.

EDGAR. He won't. [*Gloomily*] It's a sort of religion with him. Curse it! I know what's coming! He'll be voted down.

ENID. They wouldn't dare!

EDGAR. They will—they're in a funk.

ENID [*indignantly*]. He'd never stand it!

EDGAR [*with a shrug*]. My dear girl, if you're beaten in a vote, you've got to stand it.

ENID. Oh! [*She gets up in alarm.*] But would he resign?

EDGAR. Of course! It goes to the roots of his beliefs.

ENID. But he's so *wrapped up in this company*, Ted! There'd be nothing left for him! It'd be dreadful! [EDGAR *shrugs his shoulders.*] Oh, Ted, he's so old now! You mustn't let them!

EDGAR [*hiding his feelings in an outburst*]. My sympathies in this strike are all on the side of the men.

ENID. He's been Chairman for more than thirty years! He made the whole thing! And think of the bad times they've had, it's always been he who pulled them through. Oh, Ted, you must——

EDGAR. What is it you want? You said just now you hoped he'd make concessions. Now you want me to back him in not making them. This isn't a game, Enid!

ENID [*hotly*]. It isn't a game to *me* that the Dad's in danger of losing all he cares about in life. If he won't give way, and he's beaten, it'll simply break him down!

EDGAR. Didn't you say it was dreadful going on with the men in this state?

ENID. But can't you see, Ted, Father'll never get over it! You must stop them somehow. The others are afraid of him. If you back him up——

EDGAR [*putting his hand to his head*]. Against my convictions—against yours! The moment it begins to pinch one personally——

ENID. It isn't personal, it's the Dad!

EDGAR. Your family or yourself, and over goes the show!

ENID [*resentfully*]. If you don't take it seriously, I do.

EDGAR. I am as fond of him as you are; that's nothing to do with it

ENID. We can't tell about the men; it's all guesswork. But we know the Dad might have a stroke any day. D'you mean to say that he isn't more to you than——

EDGAR. Of course he is.

ENID. I don't understand you, then.

EDGAR. H'm!

ENID. If it were for oneself it would be different, but for our own Father! You don't seem to realize.

EDGAR. I realize perfectly.

ENID. It's your first duty to save him.

EDGAR. I wonder.

ENID [*imploring*]. Oh, Ted! It's the only interest he's got left; it'll be like a death-blow to him!

EDGAR [*restraining his emotion*]. I know.

ENID. Promise!

EDGAR. I'll do what I can. [*He turns to the double doors.*

[*The curtained door is opened, and* ANTHONY *appears.* EDGAR *opens the double doors, and passes through.*

[SCANTLEBURY'S *voice is faintly heard:* "*Past five; we shall never get through—have to eat another dinner at that hotel!*" *The doors are shut.* ANTHONY *walks forward.*

ANTHONY. You've been seeing Roberts, I hear.

ENID. Yes.

ANTHONY. Do you know what trying to bridge such a gulf as this is like? [ENID *puts her work on the little table, and faces him.*] Filling a sieve with sand!

ENID. Don't!

ANTHONY. You think with your gloved hands you can cure the trouble of the century? [*He passes on.*

ENID. Father! [ANTHONY *stops at the double doors.*] I'm only thinking of you!

ANTHONY [*more softly*]. I can take care of myself, my dear.

ENID. Have you thought what'll happen if you're beaten—[*she points*]—in there?

ANTHONY. I don't mean to be.

ENID. Oh! Father, don't give them a chance. You're not well; need you go to the meeting at all?

ANTHONY [*with a grim smile*]. Cut and run?

ENID. But they'll out-vote you!

ANTHONY [*putting his hand on the doors*]. We shall see!

ENID. I beg you, Dad! [ANTHONY *looks at her softly.*] Won't you?

[ANTHONY *shakes his head. He opens the doors. A buzz of voices comes in.*

SCANTLEBURY. Can one get dinner on that 6.30 train up?
TENCH. No, sir, I believe not, sir.
WILDER. Well, I shall speak out; I've had enough of this.
EDGAR [*sharply*]. What?

[*It ceases instantly.* ANTHONY *passes through, closing the doors behind him.* ENID *springs to them with a gesture of dismay. She puts her hand on the knob, and begins turning it; then goes to the fireplace, and taps her foot on the fender. Suddenly she rings the bell.* FROST *comes in by the door that leads into the hall.*

FROST. Yes, m'm?
ENID. When the men come, Frost, please show them in here; the ll's cold.
FROST. I could put them in the pantry, m'm.
ENID. No. I don't want to—to offend them; they're so touchy.
FROST. Yes, m'm. [*Pause.*] Excuse me, Mr Anthony's 'ad nothing eat all day.
ENID. I know, Frost.
FROST. Nothin' but two whiskies-and-sodas, m'm.
ENID. Oh! you oughtn't to have let him have those.
FROST [*gravely*]. Mr Anthony is a little difficult, m'm. It's not as he were a younger man, an' knew what was good for 'im; he will ve his own way.
ENID. I suppose we all want that.
FROST. Yes, m'm. [*Quietly*] Excuse me speakin' about the strike. n sure if the other gentlemen were to give up to Mr Anthony, and ietly let the men 'ave what they want, afterwards, that'd be the st way. I find that very useful with him at times, m'm. [ENID *ikes her head.*] If he's crossed, it makes him violent [*with an air of covery*], and I've noticed in my own case, when I'm violent I'm vays sorry for it afterwards.
ENID [*with a smile*]. Are *you* ever violent, Frost?
FROST. Yes, m'm; oh! sometimes very violent.
ENID. I've never seen you.
FROST [*impersonally*]. No, m'm; that is so.

[ENID *fidgets towards the door's back.*

*ith feeling*] Bein' with Mr Anthony, as you know, m'm, ever ce I was fifteen, it worries me to see him crossed like this at his age. e taken the liberty to speak to Mr Wenklin [*dropping his voice*]—seems be the most sensible of the gentlemen—but 'e said to me: "That's very well, Frost, but this strike's a very serious thing," 'e said. erious for all parties, no doubt," I said, "but yumour 'im, sir," I d, "yumour 'im. It's like this, if a man comes to a stone wall, 'e esn't drive 'is 'ead against it, 'e gets over it." "Yes," 'e said, "you'd

better tell your master that." [FROST *looks at his nails.*] That' where it is, m'm. I said to Mr Anthony this morning: "Is it wort it, sir?" "Damn it," he said to me, "Frost! Mind your own busi ness, or take a month's notice!" Beg pardon, m'm, for using such word.

ENID [*moving to the double doors, and listening*]. Do you know tha man Roberts, Frost?

FROST. Yes, m'm; that's to say, not to speak to. But to *look* at 'in you can tell what *he's* like.

ENID [*stopping*]. Yes?

FROST. He's not one of these 'ere ordinary 'armless Socialists. 'E' violent; got a fire inside 'im. What I call 'personal.' A man ma 'ave what opinion 'e likes, so long as 'e's not personal; when 'e's tha 'e's *not* safe.

ENID. I think that's what my father feels about Roberts.

FROST. No doubt, m'm, Mr Anthony has a feeling against hi [ENID *glances at him sharply, but, finding him in perfect earnest, stand biting her lips, and looking at the double doors.*] It's a regular righ down struggle between the two. I've no patience with this Roberts from what I 'ear he's just an ordinary workin' man like the rest o 'em. If he did invent a thing he's no worse off than 'undreds o others. My brother invented a new kind o' dumb waiter — nobod gave *him* anything for it, an' there it is, bein' used all over th place. [ENID *moves closer to the doors.*] There's a kind o' man tha never forgives the world, because 'e wasn't born a gentleman. Wha I say is—no man that's a gentleman looks down on another ma because 'e 'appens to be a class or two above 'im, no more than if ' 'appens to be a class or two below.

ENID [*with slight impatience*]. Yes, I know, Frost, of course. Wi you please go in and ask if they'll have some tea; say I sent you.

FROST. Yes, m'm.

[*He opens the doors gently and goes in. There is a momentar sound of earnest, rather angry talk.*

WILDER. I don't agree with you.

WANKLIN. We've had this over a dozen times.

EDGAR [*impatiently*]. Well, what's the proposition?

SCANTLEBURY. Yes, what does your father say? Tea? Not for m not for me!

WANKLIN. What I understand the Chairman to say is this——

[FROST *re-enters closing the door behind hi*

ENID [*moving from the door*]. Won't they have any tea, Frost?

[*She goes to the little table, and remains motionless, looking at th baby's frock.*

[*A* PARLOURMAID *enters from the hal*

PARLOURMAID. A Miss Thomas, m'm.
ENID [*raising her head*]. Thomas? What Miss Thomas—d'you mean —?
PARLOURMAID. Yes, m'm.
ENID [*blankly*]. Oh! Where is she?
PARLOURMAID. In the porch.
ENID. I don't want—— [*She hesitates.*
FROST. Shall I dispose of her, m'm?
ENID. I'll come out. No, show her in here, Ellen.
[*The* PARLOURMAID *and* FROST *go out.* ENID, *pursing her lips, sits at the little table, taking up the baby's frock. The* PARLOURMAID *ushers in* MADGE THOMAS *and goes out;* MADGE *stands by the door.*
ENID. Come in. What is it? What have you come for, please?
MADGE. Brought a message from Mrs Roberts.
ENID. A message? Yes.
MADGE. She asks you to look after her mother.
ENID. I don't understand.
MADGE [*sullenly*]. That's the message.
ENID. But—what—why?
MADGE. Annie Roberts is dead. [*There is a silence.*
ENID [*horrified*]. But it's only a little more than an hour since I saw r.
MADGE. Of cold and hunger.
ENID [*rising*]. Oh! that's not true! the poor thing's heart—— hat makes you look at me like that? I tried to help her.
MADGE [*with suppressed savagery*]. I thought you'd like to know.
ENID [*passionately*]. It's so unjust! Can't you see that I want to lp you all?
MADGE. I never harmed anyone that hadn't harmed me first.
ENID [*coldly*]. What harm have I done you? Why do you speak to e like that?
MADGE [*with the bitterest intensity*]. You come out of your comfort spy on us! A week of hunger, that's what *you* want!
ENID [*standing her ground*]. Don't talk nonsense!
MADGE. I saw her die; her hands were blue with the cold.
ENID [*with a movement of grief*]. Oh! why wouldn't she let me help r? It's such senseless pride!
MADGE. Pride's better than nothing to keep your body warm.
ENID [*passionately*]. I won't talk to you! How can you tell what I el? It's not my fault that I was born better off than you.
MADGE. We don't want your money.
ENID. You don't understand, and you don't want to; please to go ay!

MADGE [*balefully*]. You've killed her, for all your soft words, you and your father——

ENID [*with rage and emotion*]. That's wicked! My father is suffering himself through this wretched strike.

MADGE [*with sombre triumph*]. Then tell him Mrs Roberts is dead. That'll make him better.

ENID. Go away!

MADGE. When a person hurts us we get it back on them.

[*She makes a sudden and swift movement towards* ENID, *fixing her eyes on the child's frock lying across the little table.* ENID *snatches the frock up, as though it were the child itself. They stand a yard apart, crossing glances.*

MADGE [*pointing to the frock with a little smile*]. Ah! You felt that. Lucky it's her mother—not her children—you've to look after, isn't it? *She* won't trouble you long!

ENID. Go away!

MADGE. I've given you the message.

[*She turns and goes out into the hall.* ENID, *motionless till she has gone, sinks down at the table, bending her head over the frock, which she is still clutching to her. The double doors are opened, and* ANTHONY *comes slowly in; he passes his daughter, and lowers himself into an armchair. He is very flushed.*

ENID [*hiding her emotion—anxiously*]. What is it, Dad? [ANTHONY *makes a gesture, but does not speak.*] Who was it? [ANTHONY *does not answer.* ENID *going to the double doors meets* EDGAR *coming in. They speak together in low tones.*] What is it, Ted?

EDGAR. That fellow Wilder! Taken to personalities! He was downright insulting.

ENID. What did he *say*?

EDGAR. Said Father was too old and feeble to know what he was doing! The Dad's worth six of him!

ENID. Of course he is. [*They look at* ANTHONY.

[*The doors open wider,* WANKLIN *appears with* SCANTLEBURY.

SCANTLEBURY [*sotto voce*]. I don't like the look of this!

WANKLIN [*going forward*]. Come, Chairman! Wilder sends you his apologies. A man can't do more.

[WILDER, *followed by* TENCH, *comes in, and goes to* ANTHONY.

WILDER [*glumly*]. I withdraw my words, sir. I'm sorry.

[ANTHONY *nods to him.*

ENID. You haven't come to a decision, Mr Wanklin?

[WANKLIN *shakes his head.*

WANKLIN. We're all here, Chairman; what do you say? Shall we get on with the business, or shall we go back to the other room?

SCANTLEBURY. Yes, yes; let's get on. We must settle something.

[*He turns from a small chair, and settles himself suddenly in the largest chair, with a sigh of comfort.*

[WILDER *and* WANKLIN *also sit; and* TENCH, *drawing up a straight-backed chair close to his Chairman, sits on the edge of it with the minute-book and a stylographic pen.*

ENID [*whispering*]. I want to speak to you a minute, Ted.

[*They go out through the double doors.*

WANKLIN. Really, Chairman, it's no use soothing ourselves with a sense of false security. If this strike's not brought to an end before the General Meeting, the shareholders will certainly haul us over the coals.

SCANTLEBURY [*stirring*]. What—what's that?

WANKLIN. I know it for a fact.

ANTHONY. Let them!

WILDER. And get turned out?

WANKLIN [*to* ANTHONY]. I don't mind martyrdom for a policy in which I believe, but I object to being burnt for some one else's principles.

SCANTLEBURY. Very reasonable—you must see that, Chairman.

ANTHONY. We owe it to other employers to stand firm.

WANKLIN. There's a limit to that.

ANTHONY. You were all full of fight at the start.

SCANTLEBURY [*with a sort of groan*]. We thought the men would give in, but they—haven't!

ANTHONY. They will!

WILDER [*rising and pacing up and down*]. I can't have my reputation as a man of business destroyed for the satisfaction of starving the men out. [*Almost in tears*] I can't have it! How can we meet the shareholders with things in the state they are?

SCANTLEBURY. Hear, hear—hear, hear!

WILDER [*lashing himself*]. If anyone expects me to say to them I've lost you fifty thousand pounds and sooner than put my pride in my pocket I'll lose you another—— [*Glancing at* ANTHONY] It's—it's unnatural! *I don't want to* go against you, sir——

WANKLIN [*persuasively*]. Come, Chairman, we're *not* free agents. We're part of a machine. Our only business is to see the Company earns as much profit as it safely can. If you blame me for want of principle I say that we're Trustees. Reason tells us we shall never get back in the saving of wages what we shall lose if we continue this struggle—really, Chairman, we *must* bring it to an end, on the best terms we can make.

ANTHONY. No! [*There is a pause of general dismay.*

WILDER. It's a deadlock, then. [*Letting his hands drop with a sort of despair*] Now I shall never get off to Spain!

WANKLIN [*retaining a trace of irony*]. You hear the consequences of your victory, Chairman?

WILDER [*with a burst of feeling*]. My wife's *ill*!

SCANTLEBURY. Dear, dear! You don't say so!

WILDER. If I don't get her out of this cold, I won't answer for the consequences.

[*Through the double doors* EDGAR *comes in looking very grave.*

EDGAR [*to his father*]. Have you heard this, sir? Mrs Roberts is dead! [*Every one stares at him, as if trying to gauge the importance of this news.*] Enid saw her this afternoon, she had no coals, or food, or anything. It's enough!

[*There is a silence, every one avoiding the other's eyes, except* ANTHONY, *who stares hard at his son.*

SCANTLEBURY. You don't suggest that we could have helped the poor thing?

WILDER [*flustered*]. The woman was in bad health. Nobody can say there's any responsibility on us. At least—not on me.

EDGAR [*hotly*]. I say that we *are* responsible.

ANTHONY. War is war!

EDGAR. Not on women!

WANKLIN. It not infrequently happens that women are the greatest sufferers.

EDGAR. If we knew that, all the more responsibility rests on us.

ANTHONY. This is no matter for amateurs.

EDGAR. Call me what you like, sir. It's sickened me. We had no right to carry things to such a length.

WILDER. I don't like this business a bit—that Radical rag will twist it to their own ends; see if they don't! They'll get up some cock-and-bull story about the poor woman's dying from starvation. I wash my hands of it.

EDGAR. You can't. None of us can.

SCANTLEBURY [*striking his fist on the arm of his chair*]. But I protest against this——

EDGAR. Protest as you like, Mr Scantlebury, it won't alter facts.

ANTHONY. That's enough.

EDGAR [*facing him angrily*]. No, sir. I tell you exactly what I think. If we pretend the men are not suffering, it's humbug; and if they're suffering, we know enough of human nature to know the women are suffering more, and as to the children — well — it's damnable! [SCANTLEBURY *rises from his chair.*] I don't say that we meant to be cruel, I don't say anything of the sort; but I do say it's criminal to shut our eyes to the facts. We employ these men, and we can't get out of it. I don't care so much about the men, but I'd sooner resign my position on the Board than go on starving women in this way.

[*All except* ANTHONY *are now upon their feet.* ANTHONY *sits grasping the arms of his chair and staring at his son.*

SCANTLEBURY. I don't—I don't like the way you're putting it, young sir.

WANKLIN. You're rather overshooting the mark.

WILDER. I should think so indeed!

EDGAR [*losing control*]. It's no use blinking things! if *you* want to have the death of women on your hands—*I* don't!

SCANTLEBURY. Now, now, young man!

WILDER. On *our* hands? Not on *mine*. I won't have it!

EDGAR. We are five members of this Board; if we were four against it, why did we let it drift till it came to this? You know perfectly well why—because we hoped we should starve the men out. Well, all we've done is to starve one woman out!

SCANTLEBURY [*almost hysterically*]. I protest, I protest! I'm a humane man—we're all humane men!

EDGAR [*scornfully*]. There's nothing wrong with our *humanity*. It's our imaginations, Mr Scantlebury.

WILDER. Nonsense! My imagination's as good as yours.

EDGAR. If so, it isn't good enough.

WILDER. I foresaw this!

EDGAR. Then why didn't you put your foot down!

WILDER. Much good that would have done. [*He looks at* ANTHONY.

EDGAR. If you, and I, and each one of us here who say that our imaginations are so good——

SCANTLEBURY [*flurried*]. I never said so.

EDGAR [*paying no attention*]. —had put our feet down, the thing would have been ended long ago, and this poor woman's life wouldn't have been crushed out of her like this. For all we can tell there may be a dozen other starving women.

SCANTLEBURY. For God's sake, sir, don't use that word at a—at a Board meeting; it's—it's monstrous.

EDGAR. I *will* use it, Mr Scantlebury.

SCANTLEBURY. Then I shall not listen to you. I shall not listen! It's painful to me. [*He covers his ears.*

WANKLIN. None of us are opposed to a settlement, except your father.

EDGAR. I'm certain that if the shareholders knew——

WANKLIN. I don't think you'll find their imaginations are any better than ours. Because a woman happens to have a weak heart——

EDGAR. A struggle like this finds out the weak spots in everybody. Any child knows that. If it hadn't been for this cut-throat policy, she needn't have died like this; and there wouldn't be all this misery that anyone who isn't a fool can see is going on. [*Throughout the foregoing*

ANTHONY *has eyed his son; he now moves as though to rise, but stops as* EDGAR *speaks again.*] I don't defend the men, or myself, or anybody.

WANKLIN. You may have to! A coroner's jury of disinterested sympathizers may say some very nasty things. We mustn't lose sight of our position.

SCANTLEBURY [*without uncovering his ears*]. Coroner's jury! No, no, it's not a case for that?

EDGAR. I've had enough of cowardice.

WANKLIN. Cowardice is an unpleasant word, Mr Edgar Anthony. It will look very like cowardice if we suddenly concede the men's demands when a thing like this happens; we must be careful!

WILDER. Of course we must. We've no knowledge of this matter, except a rumour. The proper course is to put the whole thing into the hands of Harness to settle for us; that's natural, that's what we *should* have come to anyway.

SCANTLEBURY [*with dignity*]. Exactly! [*Turning to* EDGAR] And as to you, young sir, I can't sufficiently express my—my distaste for the way you've treated the whole matter. You ought to withdraw! Talking of starvation, talking of cowardice! Considering what our views are! Except your own father—we're all agreed the only policy is—is one of goodwill—it's most irregular, it's most improper, and all I can say is it's—it's given me pain——

[*He places his hand on the centre of his scheme.*

EDGAR [*stubbornly*]. I withdraw nothing.

[*He is about to say more when* SCANTLEBURY *once more covers up his ears.* TENCH *suddenly makes a demonstration with the minute-book. A sense of having been engaged in the unusual comes over all of them, and one by one they resume their seats.* EDGAR *alone remains on his feet.*

WILDER [*with an air of trying to wipe something out*]. I pay no attention to what young Mr Anthony has said. Coroner's jury! The idea's preposterous. I—I move this amendment to the Chairman's motion: That the dispute be placed at once in the hands of Mr Simon Harness for settlement, on the lines indicated by him this morning. Anyone second that? [TENCH *writes in the book.*

WANKLIN. I do.

WILDER. Very well, then; I ask the Chairman to put it to the Board.

ANTHONY [*with a great sigh—slowly*]. We have been made the subject of an attack. [*Looking round at* WILDER *and* SCANTLEBURY *with ironical contempt*] I take it on *my* shoulders. I am seventy-six years old. I have been Chairman of this Company since its inception two-and-thirty years ago. I have seen it pass through good and evil report. My connection with it began in the year that this young man was

born. [EDGAR *bows his head.* ANTHONY, *gripping his chair, goes on.*] I have had to do with 'men' for fifty years; I've always stood up to them; I have never been beaten yet. I have fought the men of this company four times, and four times I have beaten them. It has been said that I am not the man I was. [*He looks at* WILDER.] However that may be, I am man enough to stand to my guns. [*His voice grows stronger. The double doors are opened.* ENID *slips in, followed by* UNDERWOOD, *who restrains her.*] The men have been treated justly, they have had fair wages, we have always been ready to listen to complaints. It has been said that times have changed; if they have, I have not changed with them. Neither will I. It has been said that masters and men are equal! Cant! There can only be one master in a house! Where two men meet the better man will rule. It has been said that Capital and Labour have the same interests. Cant! Their interests are as wide asunder as the Poles. It has been said that the Board is only part of a machine. Cant! We *are* the machine; its brains and sinews; it is for us to lead and to determine what is to be done, and to do it without fear or favour. Fear of the men! Fear of the shareholders! Fear of our own shadows! Before I am like that, I hope to die. [*He pauses, and, meeting his son's eyes, goes on.*] There is only one way of treating 'men'—with *the iron hand.* This half-and-half business, the half-and-half manners of this generation has brought all this upon us. Sentiment and softness, and what this young man, no doubt, would call his social policy. You can't eat cake and have it! This middle-class sentiment, or socialism, or whatever it may be, is rotten. Masters are masters, men are men! Yield one demand, and they will make it six. They are [*he smiles grimly*] like Oliver Twist, asking for more. If I were in *their* place I should be the same. But I am not in their place. Mark my words: one fine morning, when you have given way here, and given way there—you will find you have parted with the ground beneath your feet, and are deep in the bog of bankruptcy; and with you, floundering in that bog, will be the very men you have given way to. I have been accused of being a domineering tyrant, thinking only of my pride—I am thinking of the future of this country, threatened with the black waters of confusion, threatened with mob government, threatened with what I cannot see. If by any conduct of mine I help to bring this on us, I shall be ashamed to look my fellows in the face.

[ANTHONY *stares before him, at what he cannot see, and there is perfect stillness.* FROST *comes in from the hall, and all but* ANTHONY *look round at him uneasily.*

FROST [*to his master*]. The men are here, sir. [ANTHONY *makes a gesture of dismissal.*] Shall I bring them in, sir?

ANTHONY. Wait! [FROST *goes out,* ANTHONY *turns to face his son.*] I

come to the attack that has been made upon me. [EDGAR, *with a gesture of deprecation, remains motionless, with his head a little bowed.*] A woman has died. I am told that her blood is on my hands; I am told that on my hands is the starvation and the suffering of other women and of children.

EDGAR. I said "on *our* hands," sir.

ANTHONY. It is the same. [*His voice grows stronger and stronger, his feeling is more and more made manifest.*] I am not aware that if my adversary suffer in a fair fight not sought by me it is *my* fault. If I fall under *his* feet—as fall I may—I shall not complain. That will be *my* look-out—and this is—his. I cannot separate, as I would, these men from their women and children. A fair fight is a fair fight! Let them learn to think before they pick a quarrel!

EDGAR [*in a low voice*]. But is it a fair fight, Father? Look at them, and look at us! They've only this one weapon!

ANTHONY [*grimly*]. And you're weak-kneed enough to teach them how to use it! It seems the fashion nowadays for men to take their enemy's side. I have not learnt that art. Is it my fault that they quarrelled with their Union too?

EDGAR. There is such a thing as Mercy.

ANTHONY. And Justice comes before it.

EDGAR. What seems just to one man, sir, is injustice to another.

ANTHONY [*with suppressed passion*]. You accuse me of injustice—of what amounts to inhumanity—of cruelty——

[EDGAR *makes a gesture of horror—a general frightened movement.*

WANKLIN. Come, come, Chairman!

ANTHONY [*in a grim voice*]. These are the words of my own son. They are the words of a generation that I don't understand; the words of a soft breed.

[*A general murmur. With a violent effort* ANTHONY *recovers his control.*

EDGAR [*quietly*]. I said it of *myself* too, Father.

[*A long look is exchanged between them, and* ANTHONY *puts out his hand with a gesture as if to sweep the personalities away; then places it against his brow, swaying as though from giddiness. There is a movement towards him. He waves them back.*

ANTHONY. Before I put this amendment to the Board, I have one more word to say. [*He looks from face to face.*] If it is carried, it means that we shall fail in what we set ourselves to do. It means that we shall fail in the duty that we owe to all Capital. It means that we shall fail in the duty that we owe ourselves. It means that we shall be open to constant attack to which we as constantly shall have to yield.

Be under no misapprehension—run this time, and you will never make a stand again! You will have to fly like curs before the whips of your own men. If that is the lot you wish for, you will vote for this amendment.

[*He looks again, from face to face, finally resting his gaze on* EDGAR; *all sit with their eyes on the ground.* ANTHONY *makes a gesture, and* TENCH *hands him the book. He reads.*

"Moved by Mr Wilder, and seconded by Mr Wanklin: 'That the men's demands be placed at once in the hands of Mr Simon Harness for settlement on the lines indicated by him this morning.'" [*With sudden vigour*] Those in favour signify the same in the usual way!

[*For a minute no one moves; then hastily, just as* ANTHONY *is about to speak,* WILDER'S *hand and* WANKLIN'S *are held up, then* SCANTLEBURY'S, *and last* EDGAR'S, *who does not lift his head.*

Contrary? [ANTHONY *lifts his own hand.* [*In a clear voice*] The amendment is carried. I resign my position on this Board. [ENID *gasps, and there is dead silence.* ANTHONY *sits motionless, his head slowly drooping; suddenly he heaves as though the whole of his life had risen up within him.*] Fifty years! You have disgraced me, gentlemen. Bring in the men!

[*He sits motionless, staring before him. The Board draws hurriedly together, and forms a group.* TENCH *in a frightened manner speaks into the hall.* UNDERWOOD *almost forces* ENID *from the room.*

WILDER [*hurriedly*]. What's to be said to them? Why isn't Harness here? Ought we to see the men before he comes? I don't——

TENCH. Will you come in, please?

[*Enter* THOMAS, GREEN, BULGIN, *and* ROUS, *who file up in a row past the little table.* TENCH *sits down and writes. All eyes are fixed on* ANTHONY, *who makes no sign.*

WANKLIN [*stepping up to the little table, with nervous cordiality*]. Well, Thomas, how's it to be? What's the result of your meeting?

ROUS. Sim Harness has our answer. He'll tell you what it is. We're waiting for him. He'll speak for us.

WANKLIN. Is that so, Thomas?

THOMAS [*sullenly*]. Yes. Roberts will not be coming, his wife is dead.

SCANTLEBURY. Yes, yes! Poor woman! Yes! Yes!

FROST [*entering from the hall*]. Mr Harness, sir!

[*As* HARNESS *enters he retires.*

[HARNESS *has a piece of paper in his hand, he bows to the Directors, nods towards the men, and takes his stand behind the little table in the very centre of the room.*

HARNESS. Good evening, gentlemen.

[TENCH, *with the paper he has been writing, joins him, they speak together in low tones.*

WILDER. We've been waiting for you, Harness. Hope we shall come to some——

FROST [*entering from the hall*]. Roberts. [*He goes.*

[ROBERTS *comes hastily in, and stands staring at* ANTHONY. *His face is drawn and old.*

ROBERTS. Mr Anthony, I am afraid I am a little late. I would have been here in time but for something that—has happened. [*To the men*] Has anything been said?

THOMAS. No! But, man, what made ye come?

ROBERTS. Ye told us this morning, gentlemen, to go away and reconsider our position. We have reconsidered it; we are here to bring you the men's answer. [*To* ANTHONY] Go ye back to London. We have nothing for you. By no jot or tittle do we abate our demands, nor will we until the whole of those demands are yielded.

[ANTHONY *looks at him, but does not speak. There is a movement amongst the men as though they were bewildered.*

HARNESS. Roberts!

ROBERTS [*glancing fiercely at him, and back to* ANTHONY]. Is that clear enough for ye? Is it short enough and to the point? Ye made a mistake to think that we would come to heel. Ye may break the body, but ye cannot break the spirit. Get back to London, the men have nothing for ye?

[*Pausing uneasily, he takes a step towards the unmoving* ANTHONY.

EDGAR. We're all sorry for you, Roberts, but——

ROBERTS. Keep your sorrow, young man. Let your father speak!

HARNESS [*with the sheet of paper in his hand, speaking from behind the little table*]. Roberts!

ROBERTS [*to* ANTHONY, *with passionate intensity*]. Why don't ye answer?

HARNESS. Roberts!

ROBERTS [*turning sharply*]. What is it?

HARNESS [*gravely*]. You're talking without the book; things have travelled past you. [*He makes a sign to* TENCH, *who beckons the Directors. They quickly sign his copy of the terms.*] Look at this, man! [*Holding up his sheet of paper*] "Demands conceded, *with the exception of those relating to the engineers and furnacemen.* Double wages for Saturday's overtime. Night-shifts as they are." These terms have been agreed. The men go back to work again to-morrow. The strike is at an end.

ROBERTS [*reading the paper, and turning on the men. They shrink back from him, all but* ROUS, *who stands his ground. With deadly stillness*]. Ye

have gone back on me? I stood by ye to the death; ye waited for *that* to throw me over! [*The men answer, all speaking together.*

ROUS. It's a lie!

THOMAS. Ye were past endurance, man.

GREEN. If ye'd listen to me——

BULGIN [*under his breath*]. Hold your jaw!

ROBERTS. Ye waited for *that*!

HARNESS [*taking the Directors' copy of the terms, and handing his own to* TENCH]. That's enough, men. You had better go.

[*The men shuffle slowly, awkwardly away.*

WILDER [*in a low, nervous voice*]. There's nothing to stay for now, I suppose. [*He follows to the door.*] I shall have a try for that train! Coming, Scantlebury?

SCANTLEBURY [*following with* WANKLIN]. Yes, yes; wait for me.

[*He stops as* ROBERTS *speaks.*

ROBERTS [*to* ANTHONY]. But *ye* have not signed them terms! They can't make terms without their Chairman! Ye would never sign them terms! [ANTHONY *looks at him without speaking.*] Don't tell me ye have! for the love o' God! [*With passionate appeal*] I reckoned on ye!

HARNESS [*holding out the Directors' copy of the terms*]. *The Board* has signed!

[ROBERTS *looks dully at the signatures—dashes the paper from him, and covers up his eyes.*

SCANTLEBURY [*behind his hand to* TENCH]. Look after the Chairman! He's not well; he's not well—he had no lunch. If there's any fund started for the women and children, put me down for—for twenty pounds.

[*He goes out into the hall, in cumbrous haste; and* WANKLIN, *who has been staring at* ROBERTS *and* ANTHONY *with twitchings of his face, follows.* EDGAR *remains seated on the sofa, looking at the ground;* TENCH, *returning to the bureau, writes in his minute-book.* HARNESS *stands by the little table, gravely watching* ROBERTS.

ROBERTS. Then you're no longer Chairman of this Company! [*Breaking into half-mad laughter*] Ah, ha—ah, ha, ha! They've thrown ye over—thrown over their Chairman. Ah—ha—ha! [*With a sudden dreadful calm*] So—they've done us both down, Mr Anthony?

[ENID, *hurrying through the double doors, comes quickly to her father and bends over him.*

HARNESS [*coming down and laying his hands on* ROBERTS' *sleeve*]. For shame, Roberts! Go home quietly, man; go home!

ROBERTS [*tearing his arm away*]. Home? [*Shrinking together—in a whisper*] Home!

ENID [*quietly to her father*]. Come away, dear! Come to your room!

[ANTHONY *rises with an effort. He turns to* ROBERTS, *who looks at him. They stand several seconds, gazing at each other fixedly;* ANTHONY *lifts his hand, as though to salute, but lets it fall. The expression of* ROBERTS' *face changes from hostility to wonder. They bend their heads in token of respect.* ANTHONY *turns, and slowly walks towards the curtained door. Suddenly he sways as though about to fall, recovers himself, and is assisted out by* ENID *and* EDGAR, *who has hurried across the room.* ROBERTS *remains motionless for several seconds, staring intently after* ANTHONY, *then goes out into the hall.*

TENCH [*approaching* HARNESS]. It's a great weight off my mind, Mr Harness! But what a painful scene, sir! [*He wipes his brow.*

[HARNESS, *pale and resolute, regards with a grim half-smile the quavering* TENCH.

It's all been so violent! What did he mean by "Done us both down"? If he has lost his wife, poor fellow, he oughtn't to have spoken to the Chairman like that!

HARNESS. A woman dead; and the two best men both broken!

[UNDERWOOD *enters suddenly.*

TENCH [*staring at* HARNESS—*suddenly excited*]. D'you know, sir—these terms, they're the *very same* we drew up together, you and I, and put to both sides before the fight began? All this—all this—and—and what for?

HARNESS [*in a slow grim voice*]. That's where the fun comes in!

[UNDERWOOD *without turning from the door makes a gesture of assent.*

# OUTWARD BOUND

## By SUTTON VANE

*First produced at the Everyman Theatre, London, September 17, 1923*

### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

*(in the order of their appearance)*

Scrubby
Ann
Henry
Mr Prior
Mrs Cliveden-Banks
The Rev. William Duke
Mrs Midget
Mr Lingley
The Rev. Frank Thomson

Scene: *On board ship.*
Time: *The present.*

Act I. *In harbour. Morning.*
Act II. *At sea. The same evening.*
Act III. *About six days later.*
Scene 1. *Afternoon.*
Scene 2. *The night of the same day.*

NO good play arrives 'out of the blue,' and back, farther back even than the ghost of Hamlet's father and the general Elizabethan drama of apparitions, are to be found the dramatic origins of *Outward Bound*. The miracle plays were much concerned with heaven and hell, but their writers were sure of their theological facts, nor did the audience of, for example, the Wakefield Pageant entertain doubts about the conditions shown in *The Harrowing of Hell*.

In a sense *Outward Bound* is a throw-back to the miracle play. The difference is that the miracle plays belong to the age of faith, when hell was hell and flames really burned. Meantime, of course, the drama of apparitions had developed on other lines. There may have been

stage ghosts wistfully comic, like the one in Wilde's story of *The Canterville Ghost*, and the Hebridean legend dramatized in *Mary Rose* associates itself with the thought of the wistfully tender ghost; but common practice in the use of apparitions on the stage has followed the examples of Marlowe and Shakespeare. Such episodes as the vision of Richard on the eve of Bosworth Field, or of Brutus before Philippi, indicate the normal dramatic uses of ghosts—to excite terror and remorse. The modern dream-play, which may have no terror in it, but may merely be a device for contrasting the manners and costumes of two periods, is an obvious derivation from the Elizabethan apparition.

*Outward Bound*, besides accomplishing in its triumphant first act one of the most splendid surprises of the theatre, is distinguished from any predecessors in the uncanny by giving dramatic expression to that widespread speculation about the after-life which the insane massacres of the War so generally provoked. "Where are the dead?" was the question, to which the traditional theological answer was found to be no longer satisfying. It is certainly not to be pretended that a profound reply is made by *Outward Bound*. The question, in the spirit of the age, is raised, and a remarkable play results. That is all, except that here again the modern theatre is perceived to be modernly aware of modern views, and that the theatre, like the times, rather raises than finds answers to questions.

Mr Sutton Vane, himself the son of a playwright, was an actor whose personal charm was recognized in Mr Maugham's *Cæsar's Wife* and in Mr Brighouse's *Other Times*. His later plays have failed to repeat the success of *Outward Bound*, though showing in some respects an advance in technical accomplishment.

# ACT I

*The curtain rises on a room which suggests rather than represents the lounge smoke-room of a small ocean liner. There is a bar on the right with the usual array of glasses and bottles on the counter and on the shelves behind it. On the extreme right is a small writing-table, and the rest of the furniture consists of the usual small round tables and swivel armchairs that are found in the smoke-room on most liners. Up against the bar are two high stools. Around the room at the back is a red cushioned wall-seat. The carpet is of warm neutral tone. There are three doors. One behind the bar, another leading off left, and a third, centre, opening on to the deck. This centre door is wide open, and behind it can be seen the liner railings. The colour of the sky at the back arrests the attention at once. It is a curious colour—vague and almost nondescript. There are four portholes in the back wall, fitted up with small curtains which are now drawn. Three large lights hang from the ceiling, and some small lamp-brackets on the walls.*

*The sun is shining, and it is a clear, still morning. Behind the bar stands* Scrubby, *busy polishing the glasses—preparatory to the boat sailing. He is dressed in the usual uniform of a ship's steward. His manner is always calm and reposeful, and his voice gentle and kindly. He is an elderly man, typically English.*

Ann *is seen to pass along the deck, and she comes through the centre door into the room. She is wearing a hat and coat, underneath which is a simple but very smart clinging frock of green. She is young, but one sees at once that she is terribly nervous. She pauses and looks round in a frightened manner. Then* Scrubby *clinks a glass and she turns and sees him.*

Ann. Oh, I beg your pardon—good morning.

Scrubby. Good morning, madam.

Ann. I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm afraid we've lost our way.

Scrubby. Where do you want to get to, madam?

Ann. The cabins, of course.

Scrubby. Cabins?

Ann. Yes! Where we sleep. I'm afraid I'm awfully stupid. I've never been on the sea before.

The acting rights of this play are reserved. Applications regarding amateur performances should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York.

SCRUBBY. The old ship will be highly flattered. You'll find all the berths right forward [*points to the left*] down there.

ANN. Thank you very much. [*She goes up to the centre opening and speaks to some one outside.*] Henry, come along, dear, I was quite right, this is the way.

[HENRY *enters from the deck. He is wearing a well-cut lounge suit and a dark soft hat. He is an ardent young man, about thirty years old. He is good-looking, quietly emotional, serious, and sincere. He is rather mystic in manner, and behaves like a dazed man who has recently received a severe shock.*

HENRY. Sorry, I was looking at the sea. What did you say?

ANN. This *is* the way, dear.

HENRY. Oh, good! We'll probably find all our stuff in the cabin already. How did you find out?

ANN. *He* told me. [*Indicating* SCRUBBY.

HENRY. Oh!—good morning!

SCRUBBY. Good morning, sir. [ANN *moves down to left*

HENRY. Bit confusing, these boats, aren't they?

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir, to begin with.

ANN. Come along, dear.

HENRY. I say, I'm feeling awfully tired.

ANN. Do you wonder?—after what you've been through?

HENRY. No, I suppose I don't. I can't quite focus it all even now, you know. By Jove, we'll have a gorgeous trip, though, won't we?

ANN. Yes, dear.

HENRY. The rest—the peace and—and——

ANN. Don't worry so, dear.

HENRY. And the forgetfulness——

ANN. Of course, dear, don't worry.

HENRY. No, I won't, I won't! [*To* SCRUBBY] Thanks for telling my—my wife the way.

ANN. Give me your hand.

HENRY. What's that?

ANN. Give me your hand, dear.

HENRY. Oh! You treat me like a child! I'm quite all right really.

ANN. Give me your hand. [HENRY *goes to her, takes her hand.*] There!

HENRY. Thanks for the hand.

ANN. Come along.

[*They go off together, left, and a moment later* TOM PRIOR *enters by the centre door.* PRIOR *is a slight young man, highly strung. He is not specifically drunk at the moment, but*

*rather more displays the mellow and bland cocksureness of a youth who for some time has kept himself going with constant stimulants. He is wearing a lounge suit, and is very cheerful and smiling.*

TOM. Oh!—er—good morning, steward.

SCRUBBY. Good morning, sir.

TOM. This is the smoke-room, I suppose?

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir.

TOM. Look here, then—er—how long before we sail?

SCRUBBY. About a quarter of an hour—sir—or more—or less.

TOM. Then I say, could I—er—I get a drink?

SCRUBBY. Certainly, sir.

TOM. Bravo! [*He crosses right and sits down.*] I want it.

SCRUBBY. What shall I get you, sir?

TOM. A Scotch.

SCRUBBY. Any soda-water, sir?

TOM. No, thank you.

SCRUBBY. All Scotch!

TOM. As a matter of fact, steward, you'll probably see a lot of me during this trip. Yes, you'll get to know me quite well, so I thought I'd warn you to begin with.

SCRUBBY [*brings drink*]. The warning is an honour, sir.

TOM. Yes, thanks. How much is it?

SCRUBBY. Oh, you needn't pay, sir.

TOM. What!

SCRUBBY. If you'll just sign this. [*Presents chit-book.*

TOM. Oh, yes, of course, I'd forgotten that catch. Have one yourself?

SCRUBBY. No, thank you, sir.

TOM [*drinks*]. Ah, that's better. As a matter of fact, steward, I'd a rather thick night last night——

SCRUBBY. Indeed, sir!

TOM. Yes—yes—and I want pulling together. By Jove—it must have been a jolly thick night because I can't remember anything about it now. But never mind. [*Drinks again.*] It's a gorgeous morning, anyway.

SCRUBBY. It is, sir. A pity some people should be alive to spoil it.

TOM. What's that?

SCRUBBY. I was talking to myself, sir.

TOM. I say, steward, how many passengers have we got?

SCRUBBY. Not many, sir, it's our slack time of year.

TOM. The last time I came out—why—it must be over ten years ago—I was going tea-planting, and—and—I was only about nineteen —and—— [*Pause.*] Phew, how time flies! Get me some cigarettes.

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir! Egyptians, Turkish, or Virginian?

TOM. Gold Flake. What's the old Captain like?

SCRUBBY. Very decent sort I've heard say, sir. Very respected, I *know.*

TOM. Oh, I don't like that sort—not on these small ships. Now when I went out before——

SCRUBPY. Your cigarettes, sir.

TOM. Thank you. And get me another drink. The same.

[MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS *enters from the centre and goes down to* TOM. *She is a withered old harridan of fifty odd—probably once beautiful. Smartly frocked in travelling costume. She carries an armful of magazines.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Ah, ha! I thought I knew that voice!

TOM. What! [*Rises, turns.*] Oh, really! Good gracious! Mrs Cliveden-Banks! How are you? What a surprise. [*Shakes hands.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I saw your name on the passenger list, so I asked for the bar at once, and here you are! [*Sits left of table.*

TOM. Delighted. Come and sit down. What are you doing here? [*Sits above table.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Joining my dear husband. And I'm afraid we're in for a very dull trip. There is nobody on board—at least nobody who *is* anybody. Though, of course, the poor creatures can't help that. You follow me. What I say I mean in the most kindly manner—but still, there it is.

TOM. We must try and cheer each other up then, Mrs Banks.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Yes, all friends at sea, of course. By the way, my name is *Cliveden*-Banks. You know, of course, but it's such a long while since we met. There was a plain Mrs Banks in the divorce-court lately—so silly of her—and so plain, judging from the *Daily Mirror*—a total stranger, of course. Still, it's made me very particular about my hyphen. Not that I am ever likely to appear in a divorce-court.

TOM. No, most unlikely. [*With a significant appraisal of her.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Still, you see what I mean.

[SCRUBBY *puts drink on table.*

TOM. Of course. Thank you. Mrs *Cliveden*-Banks, will you have a drink?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Thank you—what are you drinking—ginger ale?

TOM. No—er—whisky.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. At this time in the morning?

TOM. Whisky at any time in the morning, afternoon, or evening.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I'm afraid you're still a naughty boy. I'll have a ginger ale. [SCRUBBY *proceeds to fetch her the drink.*] When I said there was nobody on board, dear Mr Prior, between you and me,

there is one person on board to whom I shall take a strong objection. He's a clergyman.

Tom. Poor blighter! I should pity rather than blame him.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Oh, don't you know? Clergymen at sea are dreadfully unlucky. We shall probably all go to the bottom. If we do I shall blame the clergyman entirely. In my opinion steamship companies have no right to let clergymen travel at all. The clergy ought to stay at home in their own parishes and do good, not go gadding about all over the world putting other people's lives in danger.

Scrubby. Your ginger ale, madam! [*Puts drink on table.*

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Thank you, steward. [*Takes drink.*] Isn't that so?

Scrubby. Isn't what so, madam?

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Oh, you must have been listening to what I was saying.

Scrubby. I assure you, madam, I was not.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. How odd! [Tom *signs for drink.*] I was remarking that you seafaring men regard the presence of a clergyman on board your ship as highly unlucky.

Scrubby. I believe there is a superstition to that effect, madam, yes. [*Returns behind bar.*

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. There! I told you so. Well, the best thing we can do is to cut the fellow dead. Nicely, of course, but firmly.

Tom. Just as you like. But will we save the boat by doing it?

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. How droll you are!

Tom. Look out! Talk of the——

[*The* Rev. William Duke *enters left, crosses to desk, and looks for writing paper and envelope. As he does so he speaks to* Tom. Duke *is a very sincere, earnest young clergyman.*

Duke. Good morning, sir.

Tom [*in a loud voice to* Mrs Cliveden-Banks]. How is the Colonel?

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Dear Benjamin, I regret to say, is feeling the heat dreadfully. I should have joined him last year, but somehow I never got time. The penalty of popularity. My great friend, Mabel, the Duchess of Middleford—*you don't* know her, of course, she was only saying to me at the Palace the other day——

Duke [*as he sits at writing desk with paper, etc., turns to* Tom]. Good morning.

Tom. Eh—oh, good morning.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Who is that man?

Tom. Really, Mrs Cliveden-Banks, I dunno—I——

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. How strange! Peculiar people one must meet, mustn't one, in public places? Never mind. Let me see, where was I?

TOM. With your great friend whom I don't know.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Oh, yes, of course. [*The* REV. WILLIAM DUKE *sits left and writes.*] And then that strange man whom we neither of us know interrupted by wishing you good-morning. Never mind. Mabel pointed out to me very clearly that I was in danger of neglecting my duty. She said to me quite plainly, almost brutally, and she can be very brutal sometimes—"My dear Genevieve," she said, "you must remember you are a daughter of the Empire, a soldier's *daughter*—a soldier's *wife*. Your place is by your husband's side in far, far India." In fact, she was so insistent on my leaving England that if I didn't know her really well I should have felt she wanted to get rid of me. Still, I have taken her advice, I have abandoned London's gaieties and go to help poor dear Benjamin rule a lot of black men. Frankly I hate the idea.

DUKE [*still sitting at table, turns*]. I'm awfully sorry to bother you, madam, but could you tell me what the date is?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. What was that?

DUKE. I ought to know, of course, seeing that it's the date we sail, but my memory's so——

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Did you say the date?

DUKE. Yes, if you please.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. The *date*?

DUKE. If you would——

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. You're trying to start a conversation with me, aren't you?

DUKE [*laughs*]. Well, frankly, as we're all to be shipmates, the sooner we get to know each other the better, don't you think?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. That, young man, is a matter of opinion.

DUKE. Oh, I'm awfully sorry if—I didn't think introductions were necessary on board ship.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Possibly they may not have been in the days of Walter Raleigh. Not having been there myself at the time I cannot say for certain. But customs change at sea, young man, even though the Church remains exactly where it always was. Under the circumstances, therefore, there can be no question of me giving you a date.

DUKE. I beg your pardon—I'll find it out for myself.

[DUKE *finishes his letter and goes out left.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Was that cutting enough, dear Mr Prior?

TOM. Oh, yes, most; but what did it mean?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I don't know.

[MRS MIDGET *wanders on from the deck. A poor charwoman in little black bonnet, black shawl and dress—her best. Very humble, simple, and obviously out of place in these strange surroundings. But sweet and motherly.*

Mrs Midget. You'll excuse me, mum, but——

Mrs Cliveden-Banks [*looking up and seeing her*]. Good gracious!

Mrs Midget. You'll excuse me speaking up as it were, but I must say something to some one. And as you're the only other lady I've seen about, bar myself, I must ask you to give me a——

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Mr Prior, am I to be attacked from all sides?

Mrs Midget [*starts suddenly at sound of name*]. Mr Prior?

Tom. Any objection?

Mrs Midget. No, very pleased to meet you. You see, mum, I 'ad to follow yer because yer see, mum, I've been struck all of a 'eap.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. You've been what?

Mrs Midget. Struck all of a 'eap.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Mr Prior, rescue me. And you had better do something for this good woman, too. It appears she has been struck all of a heap—whatever that may mean.

Tom. Well—what's the trouble?

Mrs Midget. Well, sir, thanking you, it's like this, as it were——

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. "As it were." How quaint! "As it was" is correct, of course—we all know that from our Prayer Book. Go on.

Mrs Midget. Well, sir, it were like this, *as it was*; only last Saturday Mrs Roberts and I were talking about the sheets being damp, and I says——

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Ah! Sheets—damp. The good woman is, of course, a stewardess.

Tom. Are you?

Mrs Midget. Am I what?

Tom. A stewardess on this boat?

Mrs Midget. No, I'm a passenger.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. She's a passenger! Oh, I see it, she's a passenger! I see it all! The whole thing has come to me in a flash! She's a passenger. Don't worry yourself any more, Mr Prior, I have solved the good woman's trouble. She's a passenger and she's lost her way; haven't you, good woman?

Mrs Midget. Exactly, mum.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Mr Prior, tell that steward fellow to tell somebody to take the good woman back to her proper place immediately. She's been wandering. She's on the wrong deck, she's in the wrong class. Good-bye, good woman, good-bye. So glad to have been so helpful.

Mrs Midget. Thank you, mum.

Tom. Oh, steward, just get some one to show this woman steerage —er—third-class deck—or something, will you?

Scrubby [*turns to* Tom]. The third class, sir?

TOM. Yes, please.

SCRUBBY. I think you've made some mistake, sir. There is only one class on the boat.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*faintly*]. What was that?

TOM. Only one class?

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir. It's the same on all this line.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. What was that?

TOM. Oh, sorry—I didn't know. Er—Mrs Cliveden-Banks——

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Mr Prior, did I or did I not hear that fellow say there is only one class on this boat?

TOM. He said so, certainly.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Mr Prior, the thing's impossible.

TOM. Well, he ought to know.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How dare she—how dare my secretary book me a passage on a vessel with only one class? How am I to know who are the ladies and gentlemen, and who are not?

TOM. Now, now, don't get excited.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Excited! Mr Prior, a terrible thought has just struck me. That woman there——

TOM. Well, what about her?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. She probably eats.

TOM. Extremely likely, I should say.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Well, then—if she eats—and if there's only one class—she will eat in the same place as we shall. It can't be done, I shall disembark immediately.

TOM. Now look here, Mrs Banks—Mrs Cliveden-Banks—she's probably only a lady's maid or something.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Who would have a maid like that—outside a lunatic asylum?

TOM. The idea of your landing is absurd. Don't get nervy about nothing. We can easily avoid her. If you're really upset——

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. And I am, I am!

TOM. Then I'll question her.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Yes. Do, do, quickly. It would be quite impossible for me to lunch at the same table with a woman who has been struck all of a heap.

TOM. Come here, will you? I—er—we want to help you if we possibly can. [*Drinks.*

MRS MIDGET. Thank you, sir.

TOM. Excuse me. [*Finishes drink.*] Thanks. Now, what is—your name?

MRS MIDGET. Midget.

TOM. What?

MRS MIDGET. Midget.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. That, to begin with, is an *alias*. No one could possibly be called Midget.

Mrs Midget [*warming in quick resentment*]. Oh, couldn't they? Well, I'll show you whether they could or not all right. Midget's as good a name as any other name, Midget is. And don't you forget it, old Mrs 'Igh and Mighty. My name's Midget all right, Midget married me all right, and I can prove it, and I've got my lines, which was a job to get as I admit.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. How dreadfully sordid!

Mrs Midget. But when it comes to utter strangers tellin' me as I don't know what my own name is, then I speaks up and unabashed, as I would do in front of the 'ole street. I've nothing to 'ide, I've not, I'm not one of these——

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. That will do, that will do. The world is full of troubles, we know. Doubtless you have had yours, my good—er—my woman.

Mrs Midget. I 'ave 'ad trouble, I confess.

Tom. But what's your present one?—that's what—what we want to know.

Mrs Midget. Where am I?

Tom. On board—on board this ship.

Mrs Midget. Yes, but what for?

Tom. How should *I* know. Are your tickets and luggage all right?

Mrs Midget. I suppose so. I'm not one to worry over little things.

Tom. Have you been to your cabin yet?

Mrs Midget. No.

Tom. What's the number?

Mrs Midget. 'Ow do I know if I ain't been there?

Tom. I say—you're not tight, are you?

Mrs Midget. Tight?

Tom. Blotto—squiffy—gone away.

Mrs Midget. Not me. T.T. I am.

Tom. How wise of you! [*Drinks.*] Well, are you ill?

Mrs Midget. Now, that's what I'm a-wondering. Am I ill? I don't think so. I don't feel ill. And yet I said to Mrs Roberts last Thursday—or was it Wednesday?—never mind, I said to 'er any ways I says—"What I want," says I—or did she say it to me? Never mind, it don't make no difference, one of us says to it the other, "What I or you want," according to which ever of us *did* say it, "is a thorough 'oliday." And then—wait a minute—I remember now—it's all coming back—I've come on 'ere to meet somebody.

Tom. Oh, that's it, is it?

Mrs Midget. Yes, at the other end. It was our parson's idea

"A thorough 'oliday," of course! 'Ow silly of me to forget. But of course I ain't 'ad much to eat to-day and what with the excitement and one thing and another, and Mrs Roberts——

TOM. Damn Mrs Roberts!

MRS MIDGET. Oh, I do, sir—often.

TOM. Look here, what you want's a sandwich and a drink, and a good sleep. Then you'll remember everything. Some one should have brought you here, of course. But if you're being met at the other end there's nothing to worry about.

MRS MIDGET. Thank you, sir.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. The woman is obviously light-headed. Have her removed.

TOM. Steward, can you find out this passenger's stewardess for me—for her? Have her put in her charge, see she gets everything she should have. Nervous, you know, never been to sea.

SCRUBBY. Certainly, sir. [*Crosses left from behind bar*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I should certainly suggest a sleep for her. A long, long sleep—in fact, if I were in her place I should take a complete rest, have all my meals in my own cabin, and never come on deck at all. I'm sure she would feel better if she did that.

MRS MIDGET. Much obliged. But I 'ope to be 'opping about like a cricket in an 'our or two.

SCRUBBY. This way, madam.

MRS MIDGET [*flattered by the attention*]. Thank you, *Captain*.

[SCRUBBY *and* MRS MIDGET *go off together left.*

SCRUBBY. Straight ahead.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I should like to burn Miss Longton. Miss Longton is my secretary.

TOM [*looking after them*]. Do you think that woman was speaking the truth?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. No. She's probably one of a gang of international crooks. Look at the way she scraped acquaintance with me. Personally I shall be on my guard against her. [*Low-muffled siren heard.*] What do you think that is?

TOM. Sailing shortly, I suppose.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Then I shall go on deck and wave farewell to the dear old white cliffs. [*Rises.*] By the way, I'm told on many parts of the coast they're crumbling fast. Still, England, England, there is no country like her.

TOM. Thank goodness.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Why do you say that?

TOM. I don't. That's what other countries say.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How naughty you are! Well, come along and protect me from the mob.

TOM. No, thanks, if you'll excuse me. I'd far rather remain here and slip away from my native land oblivious of her disregard for me.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Which means——?

TOM. That I'm going to have another drink.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. You're a bad lad. Still, I'll see you later.

[*She passes through the centre door and goes left along the deck*

TOM. I suppose so. Confound the woman.

[*Drinks and lights cigarette.*

[*The* REV. WILLIAM DUKE *reappears from the left.*

Oh, I say, *padre*!

DUKE. How is the Colonel? [*Goes up right to table.*

TOM. *Padre!*

DUKE. Were you speaking to me, sir?

TOM. Yes. I want to—to apologize.

DUKE [*centre*]. What for?

TOM. Cutting you stone dead like the silly old woman I was with.

DUKE. Oh, that's all right.

TOM. Sure?

DUKE. Sure!

TOM. Positive?

DUKE. Positive!

TOM. Good. Have a drink?

DUKE. Thanks. [*He sits down left of table.*

TOM. The fellow will be back in a second.

DUKE. Good.

TOM. Cigarette?

DUKE. Thanks.

TOM. Hot, isn't it?

DUKE. Yes. Hot.

TOM. Yes—er—do you think we shall have—er—smooth passage?

DUKE. Quite. I mean—I hope so.

TOM. So do I.

DUKE. I suppose we all do.

TOM. Er—yes. I suppose we all do. I say, I must tell you, of ourse, that I should never have behaved as I did just now, pretending ot to see you and all that, but of course I'm a very weak character.

DUKE. Strong of you to admit it.

TOM. Yes, I'm easily swayed. No stamina. [*Drinks.*] I can't hink why. And the old cat was drivelling along, and she persuaded ne not to see you. Told me you were unlucky.

DUKE. Ha!

TOM. So I agreed not to. I always agree with anyone I'm with. he was to blame entirely.

DUKE. I have always found it an unwise habit to run down other

people. They have a nasty way of getting to hear about it and retaliating—with interest.

TOM. You're not going to preach a sermon, are you?

DUKE. Good Lor', no! I say, do you know Bethnal Green?

TOM. Good heavens, no!

DUKE. Take my advice then and don't; I do. I've known it for the last eight years. And I'm sick of the slums and people I was trying to keep straight with sermons—official and otherwise—and the drizzle, and the smell of tea in urns and the Vicar—oh, yes, the Vicar more than anything. No, no, no more sermons from me for a bit. But I beg your pardon, I must be boring you.

TOM. Not at all so far. You must have had a pretty rotten time!

[SCRUBBY *re-enters from the left and goes to bar.*

DUKE. Oh, I don't know, I'm awfully keen on my job. I want a rest, that's all.

TOM. "A thorough 'oliday," in fact. Hello, here's our man. This will do you good. What's it to be? [SCRUBBY *collects empty glasses*

DUKE. Beer, please.

TOM. Er—steward—er—what *is* your name?

SCRUBBY. Scrubby.

TOM. Midget and Scrubby. Good Lor'! Oh, well, it can't be helped, I suppose. A Bass please, and a—the same.

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir.

DUKE. I think everybody ought to be awfully keen, don't you?

TOM. What do you mean? Sort of getting up in the morning before breakfast and having a cold bath? Because if you do, I don't.

DUKE. No, no, not necessarily that, of course. But keen every moment of the day, keen on something—never wasting a moment—at it, always at it, as it were. Now, there's the trip, for instance, that we're going on. We must arrange to enjoy every moment of it.

TOM. Why?

DUKE. Because we're meant to.

TOM. Oh!

DUKE. We must organize amongst ourselves. I've thought out lots of jolly little ideas.

TOM. Such as——?

DUKE. Well—for instance—we'll get up a concert.

TOM. Oh! that will be jolly. *Must* we get up a concert?

DUKE. Of course.

TOM. How awful! Why must we?

DUKE. Just to amuse the other passengers.

TOM. *Would* it amuse the other passengers?

DUKE. And ourselves too.

TOM. Oh, I see.

DUKE. It always *is* done, you know.
TOM. Some habits want breaking——
DUKE. Do you sing?
TOM. No.
DUKE. That's a pity.
TOM. Do you recite?
DUKE. Er—no——
TOM. That's excellent! [SCRUBBY *advances with drinks.*
SCRUBBY. Your drinks, sir, and it's quite all *right.*
TOM. What's quite all *right?*
SCRUBBY. The lady, sir.
TOM. Which lady?
SCRUBBY. The lady you wanted put in charge of her stewardess.
TOM. Oh, yes, of course. That lady. Thanks very much.
SCRUBBY. Thank you, sir. [*Returns behind bar.*
DUKE. I say, I really oughtn't to know, but I'd always understood u couldn't get a drink on board a ship until she sailed?
TOM. Neither you can as a rule. That never struck me—don't say ything.
DUKE. It's very queer.
TOM. It's very lucky. Cheero!
DUKE. Cheero!
TOM. Got any other gadget on you for the passengers' amusement? rhaps you'd like me to walk the plank or something?
DUKE. We ought to have some sports, of course.
TOM. Why did I put the idea into your head?
DUKE. You can help with the organization. You need not par- ipate.
TOM. Right. I'll organize anything you like—from here. Cheery ot this.

[*Through the centre door enters* MR LINGLEY. *He is a hard and unpleasant business man, aged fifty-five or sixty. He is loud and officious, and is obviously self-made. He has on a travelling cap and a heavy overcoat, and he is carrying an attaché-case, containing business papers. He is evidently in a great hurry.*

LINGLEY. Ah, good morning, gentlemen. My name's Lingley.
TOM. Hurray!
LINGLEY. I've had a narrow shave—nearly missed her.
DUKE [*rises*]. Duke's my name. Very warm to-day, sir.
LINGLEY. Damn warm—I beg your pardon, I didn't notice your lar—very warm. Steward, get me a drink. [*Sits at table left.*
[DUKE *sits.*
SCRUBBY. Whisky-and-soda, sir?

LINGLEY. No, confound you, ginger ale with some ice. Yes, I left it a bit too late. Another five minutes and I'd have missed her.

DUKE. We'll soon be off, then?

LINGLEY. We're sailing now.

TOM. Land of hope and glory—*au revoir!* [*Drinks.*

DUKE. You motored here?

LINGLEY. No, flew—in my office two hours ago. Now I must get on with things. [*Opens attaché-case and lays out papers.*

[SCRUBBY *brings him his drink.*

DUKE [*to* TOM]. There you are, you see, the man's keen.

TOM. I *know* the blighter.

LINGLEY [*to* SCRUBBY]. How much?

SCRUBBY. You needn't pay, sir.

LINGLEY. I always pay. How much?

SCRUBBY. One shilling, sir.

LINGLEY. Damn—er—*very* expensive still—here is *one* shilling.

SCRUBBY. Thank you, sir.

LINGLEY. What for? [SCRUBBY *returns behind bar.*] I haven't tipped you.

DUKE. I hope you won't be so busy, sir, that we shan't see you on the trip.

LINGLEY. Once in my stateroom I don't suppose I'll leave it—till we touch—er—er—Marseilles.

DUKE. I hope it's interesting work, sir.

LINGLEY. No, it isn't, but it keeps me busy—I am an M.P., you know. [SCRUBBY *disappears through the door right.*

DUKE. Oh! Pleased to meet you.

LINGLEY. Not at all. I'm on the London County Council as well. Incidentally I own twenty-one music-halls, a chain of cinemas, two gold-mines, and a Methodist chapel. Naturally they want looking after.

DUKE. Naturally. What are you doing with the chapel?

LINGLEY. Having it pulled down.

TOM. Sportsman!

LINGLEY. You—you there!

TOM. Me?

LINGLEY. Yes! I know your face, don't I? I never forget a face.

TOM. How that must sadden your sweet life at times.

LINGLEY. Where have I seen it before?

TOM. Oh, in your office. You gave me a job once. It lasted two days.

LINGLEY. What was the matter?

TOM. Your office! I couldn't stand the atmosphere, so I drowned it in drink.

LINGLEY. I remember. I remember. You were sacked mechanically.

TOM. Yes. You wouldn't give me a second chance.

LINGLEY. No one has ever given *me* a second chance. I shall never xpect one. I shall certainly never ask for one.

TOM. As you said when you sacked me mechanically. In my pinion, Mr Lingley, L.C.C., M.P., you're a pompous old idiot.

LINGLEY [*rising*]. How dare you! How—you must be crazy.

TOM. I'm not in your ghastly office now. I can say what I like. *Shouts.*] You're a blue-nosed baboon! There! I've dreamt I said hat to you for weeks, and now I've said it.

LINGLEY. If you're not careful, Mr—Mr—er—er—I'll—I'll——

TOM. If *you're* not careful, Mr Lingley, I'll make you walk the plank t the sports.

LINGLEY. Mr Prior, you are obviously drunk now.

TOM. I am drunk, I admit—but I had trusted not obviously.

DUKE. Dear, dear, dear, dear!

TOM. Yes, that remark helps matters such a lot, doesn't it?

LINGLEY. I shall go on deck. Where are my papers? I've been ritated. The doctors said I must not be irritated. I've too much to o to be irritated.

DUKE. Oh, I'm sure Mr Prior didn't mean——

TOM. I did. Every word of it. Shut up! He's a pink-eyed abbit. He's a rotter, he's a grasper——

LINGLEY. Silence, sir! For goodness' sake silence! I shan't be able o concentrate after this interruption. I came here for peace, damn ou. I've been thinking too hard as it is—and now this little gnat—e's destroyed what I'd nearly completed in my mind. Damn you, r, I'm sick of opposition—— Damn you—you—— [*The long low ren is heard again.*] Oh, my God! [*Drops into a chair.*

DUKE. Mr Lingley, what is it? [*Goes to* LINGLEY.

[TOM *goes to above* LINGLEY, *glass in hand.*

LINGLEY. Wait—wait!

DUKE. You're looking ill.

LINGLEY. Yes, I am ill, I'm feeling ill, I am. Suddenly. I must ave help, I was warned about this. An arm, please—and some of that uff you're drinking. [TOM *gives him drink and supports him.*] Thank ou. I shall be all right in a minute.

DUKE. I'll get the doctor.

LINGLEY. No. He'll only irritate me. I know what to do. I've een told what to do. Absolute quiet and fresh air. I'll go on deck. *eels in pocket.*] Oh, yes, I'd forgotten. I'm to take one of these. TOM *takes phial from his pocket and gives him a tabloid.*] Thank you. must keep quiet, calm, and not think. I shall be all right in a minute, d I'll see another man the moment I get to—get to—[*looks from one the other*]—where *am* I going to?

DUKE. Marseilles, you said, sir.

LINGLEY. Oh, yes, of course, Marseilles. [*Pause.*] What am I going to Marseilles for?

DUKE. Don't worry now.

LINGLEY. No, don't worry, that's right. I felt quite faint for the moment, Mr Duke; your drink has done me good. I'll go on deck and sit down.

DUKE. I'll see you there.

LINGLEY. Thank you. I prefer to be alone. I'm quite all right. I shall soon remember everything. I know what I'm doing. [*Rises.*] Oh, I've forgotten my papers.

[TOM *supports him towards the centre door.*

DUKE. Leave them—they can wait—I'll look after them.

LINGLEY. No, no, give them to me. [TOM *gives them.*

DUKE. I wish you'd let me come and——

LINGLEY. Please don't worry me! It's all right this time, I know it is, if I'm not worried. Thank you. I know what I'm doing, of course—I know—already I'm better. I'm going to meet some one, that's all. But was it Aaronson or was it Bantock?

DUKE. Remember what your doctor said, don't worry!

LINGLEY [*going towards the door*]. Of course not—no. That was the worst attack I've had so far. But I'm better now—yes—and the quiet and sea air will soon clear my mind completely. Thank you. I wish I could remember if it was Aaronson or Bantock! Thank you, Mr Duke, for your very kind assistance.

[*He goes out slowly on to the deck and passes out of sight to the right.* DUKE *follows up after him.*

TOM. *Padre!* [*Up by centre opening.*

DUKE [*stopping*]. Well?

TOM. What was it?

DUKE. I don't know—some sudden sort of attack—I'm going to stop by him. [*Starting to follow* LINGLEY.

TOM. *Padre!*

DUKE. Well?

TOM. It was my fault, I suppose.

DUKE. Oh, no, I——

TOM. Are you angry with me?

DUKE. Why should I be?

TOM. You know.

DUKE. Drink is a terrible——

TOM. It seemed to do *him* good.

[*Returns to above table and sits and* DUKE *follows.*

DUKE. That's different.

TOM. You promised no sermons, anyway.

DUKE. What made you start it?

TOM. You said every one should be keen on something. Drink's my hobby. Let's leave it at that.

DUKE. Please don't joke about it.

TOM. All right. If you won't be angry with me—I hate people to be angry with me. But I wasn't joking.

DUKE [*over* TOM]. I'll see you later. In fact, I hope to see a lot of you on the voyage. [*Starting out centre.*

TOM. Thanks. That's what I said to the steward. [*Stopping him again*] *Padre!*

DUKE [*returning*]. Well—well!

TOM. One moment.

DUKE. What is it?

TOM. In strict confidence—now we're friends again—has it struck you by any chance that there's anything queer about this boat? Strictly between ourselves.

DUKE. No, it hasn't.

TOM. It has me.

DUKE. How do you mean?

TOM. I think there's something jolly queer about her. By Jove, if I were right it *would* be a joke!

DUKE. I don't follow you.

TOM. It's difficult to explain. But Mr Lingley—and—and—oh, I'm not quite sure myself. It may be only my——

DUKE. Imagination?

TOM. Exactly. Only somehow I don't think it is.

DUKE. Go on. I must hurry.

TOM. Yes. Well [*turns to* DUKE], there was a sort of charwoman here just now—you didn't see her—a very decent sort of soul, of course, but—well—hardly the kind of person you'd expect to find here. And she couldn't remember where she was going. Excepting she was going to meet some one. [*Turns to him.*] Now this Lingley fellow's just told us the same thing in different words. He couldn't remember where he was going either, at least not clearly. And I've noticed lots of other little things. For instance, it's absurd sailing with our passenger list—there are so few of us. I tell you it's queer—and——

DUKE. Really, I can't follow you.

TOM. Then there's old Mrs Banks drivelling on about joining her husband—— Good Lor'! It's just struck me.

DUKE. What has?

TOM. Colonel Cliveden-Banks kicked the bucket over a month ago. Surely she can't have forgotten *that*? Or—or would *that* be her father?

DUKE. Mr Prior, if you take my advice, you'll follow Mr Lingley's example and get some fresh air on deck.

TOM. Yes, I think I will. All the same it *is* queer. [*Rises to above table.*] Certain you're not angry with me?

DUKE. Oh, yes, certain. Shipmates, eh? [*Shakes hands*

TOM. Oh, yes, shipmates. But I bet you cut me the moment we land

DUKE. Rot!

[*He follows* LINGLEY *on to the deck.* HENRY *has entered, and is lighting his pipe from a match which he has taken from the table down left.*

TOM. Excuse me, sir, after you. [*Coming up to him, takes his match and lights his cigarette from it.*] Thanks. I say, do you mind if I ask you a question?

HENRY. Of course not.

TOM. It's rather a queer question.

HENRY. Go on.

TOM. Do—you—know—where—you—are—going—to?

HENRY. Are you a Salvation Army man or what?

TOM. No, I'm quite serious.

HENRY. Of course I know where I'm going to.

TOM. On this boat?

HENRY. Certainly.

TOM. Thank goodness! Now I'm going to get some fresh air!

[*He goes out on to the deck.* HENRY *goes up towards the deck, looks out.* ANN *enters left.*

ANN. Why did you run away?

HENRY. Wanted a match.

ANN. I had some.

HENRY. A bit nervy too. [*Coming down centre.*

ANN. You've no need to be now—we've sailed.

HENRY. Really!

ANN. Yes. I saw the water moving by the porthole.

HENRY [*runs up centre and looks out*]. You're right. Why, we're well out. Almost open water.

ANN. Yes, dear.

HENRY. Give me your hand. [*To her.*

ANN. Hold tight to it.

HENRY. Queer. It's just like an ordinary sailing.

ANN. Is it? [*Pause.*

HENRY. A man just now asked me if I knew where I was going. I said I did.

ANN. That was right.

HENRY. Funny question though, wasn't it?

ANN. Oh, I don't know.

HENRY. He said it was queer. You don't think he——

ANN. Of course not, dear. Can you smell the sea?

HENRY. Yes, fine, isn't it?

ANN. I hope it will be terribly rough with lots of spray and wind.

HENRY. Why?

ANN. You can hold me closer.

HENRY. Ann! Ann! I've been worrying, I've been thinking just now—these modern inventions—and things like that, you know.

ANN. You prosaic old thing—aren't you?

HENRY. They couldn't possibly call us back even now, could they?

ANN. Of course not, dear. How could they? We're safe enough as long as we hold tight.

HENRY. It was a risk, though, wasn't it?

ANN. Yes, dear.

HENRY. If—supposing—if it hadn't happened?

ANN. My dear, we always knew it would.

HENRY. Yes, but if it hadn't?

ANN. But we knew.

HENRY. I think you were always more certain than I was.

ANN [*sits*]. Well, then, I knew for both of us.

HENRY [*sits*]. Yes, that's right. You knew. Ann, I trust you so in things I can't quite understand. Of course I trust you in things I can understand too. But you seem to know so much more about the big things than I do.

ANN. Perhaps I only pretend to.

HENRY. Oh, no, you know all right. Give me another light, will you? Thanks. It's nice being able to smoke. Ann?

ANN. Well, dear.

HENRY. You're quite, quite sure?

ANN. Quite sure, dear.

HENRY. Isn't ours a terribly big secret?

ANN. Isn't it?

HENRY. Yes, Ann, I love you.

ANN. I love you, Henry.

HENRY. Always?

ANN. Always.

HENRY. Ann, I wonder how the dog is?

ANN. You baby—poor old Jock! Oh, they'll look after him all right.

HENRY. I hope so. I say, Ann, when dogs die, what do you think happens to them?

ANN. I dunno. There must be some sort of doggie's heaven, I suppose.

HENRY. What a jolly place it must be! No cats in it, of course.

ANN. Of course not. Just lots of bones and meat and water. And hot fires to lie in front of in the winter.

HENRY. What about the kind masters?

ANN. I'd forgotten them. Oh, I expect there's some arrangement so that the good dogs can't remember the kind masters.

HENRY. *We* remember, though.

ANN. Yes. *You* were a very kind master.

HENRY [*rises*]. It's queer. [*Over to centre.*] Poor old Jock. [*Turns.*] I say, Ann, you don't think——

ANN. What?

HENRY. Any of these other people can possibly know.

ANN. Our secret? Of course they can't.

HENRY. It *is* a wonderful secret.

ANN [*rises*]. I told you, Henry, how it would be as long as we believed.

HENRY. And yet? [*Over to her.*] I wonder if it's safe—even now.

ANN. What makes you say that?

HENRY. I can't quite remember, Ann, not clearly, not yet—it's coming back gradually of course, but—but——

ANN. Yes, dear?

HENRY. Ann, haven't you and I sinned in some way?

ANN. We've been true to each other. How can we have sinned?

HENRY. If we had, Ann, could they separate us?

ANN. Hold my hand tightly.

HENRY. I'm trying so hard to remember.

ANN. What, dear?

HENRY. What it is we've done that isn't right.

ANN. We've done nothing that isn't right.

HENRY. No. Not in our light, of course. But have we from other—from the world's——

ANN. We've never cared for the world. We're not going to care for it now.

HENRY. If we were wrong and if it were something very, very wrong, they couldn't separate us, could they?

ANN. You've forgotten our secret.

HENRY. No, I haven't. It's all perfect, of course—excepting this one thing. [TOM *enters from the deck and unobserved by them stands quietly at the back leaning against doorway.*] Don't laugh—don't laugh at me, Ann, I'm only trying to remember, and asking for your help. But it seems [*sits*] to me this thing—this crime, if it is one—that we've committed, is something big and yet that it's—now, don't laugh—that it's only something to do with gas.

ANN [*stands beside him*]. Gas?

HENRY. Yes.

ANN. You silly!

HENRY. It seems to me that before we left the flat——

ANN. Our sad little flat!

HENRY. I forgot—to turn off—the gas.

ANN. You terrible silly! Of course you did. We—agreed—that. That's what we agreed.

HENRY. There's nothing very wrong in not turning off gas!

ANN. Don't worry, dear. Take my hand.

HENRY [*laughs*]. Nothing so bad that they could separate us for it. You can't blame people for not turning off gas! And yet, I'd have sworn—— Ann, you're quite certain that there isn't something else we've done? Something big?

ANN. There's nothing else, dear, I'm certain. You've nothing to be ashamed of.

HENRY. I love you so.

ANN. Thank you, Henry. Don't worry, dear.

HENRY. I wish I could remember *how* we got here. We wanted to so long. Anyway, now we have.

ANN. Let's go out on to the deck.

HENRY. Yes, let's—bless you. [*Both turn and see* TOM.] Hello, sir!

TOM [*quietly*]. Hello!

HENRY. We didn't notice you——

TOM. It's all right. I just came back to——

HENRY. May I introduce my wife? Ann, this is the gentleman who asked me if I knew where I was going.

ANN. How do you do?

TOM. How do you do?

[TOM *is a changed man. His tone is quiet and sad, and he stands perfectly rigid. The awful truth which has dawned upon him has completely sobered him. There is a pause. Then* ANN *goes out on to the deck, and* HENRY *follows her.*

HENRY [*as he goes*]. We'll see you later. We've sailed, you know.

[SCRUBBY *appears behind the bar.*

TOM. Yes, I am right. [*Comes down to bar.*] The same.

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir; certainly, sir. A *very* warm day, sir.

[*Bringing drink to table.*

TOM. I am right, aren't I, Scrubby?

SCRUBBY. Right, sir, in the head, do you mean?

TOM [*takes drink*]. You know what I mean.

SCRUBBY. No, I don't, sir. Right about what?

TOM. You—I—all of us on the boat.

SCRUBBY. What about all of us on this boat, sir?

TOM [*trembling with apprehension*]. We are—now answer me truthfully—we are all *dead, aren't we?*

SCRUBBY [*after a pause. Very quietly, with firm conviction*]. Yes, sir.

we are all dead. Quite dead. They don't find out so soon as you have, as a rule.

TOM [*pause*]. Queer! [*Sits left of table.*

SCRUBBY. Not when you get used to it, sir.

TOM. How long have you been—you been—oh, you know?

SCRUBBY. Me, sir? Oh, I was lost young.

TOM. You were what?

SCRUBBY. Lost young, sir.

TOM. I don't understand.

SCRUBBY. No, sir, you wouldn't, not yet. But you'll get to know lots of things as the voyage goes on.

TOM. Tell me—tell me one thing—*now.*

[*His anxiety is terrific, and he is in a state of extreme tension.*

SCRUBBY. Anything I can, sir.

TOM [*terrified*]. Where—where are we sailing for?

SCRUBBY. Heaven, sir. [*Pause.*] And hell too. [*Pause.*] It's the same place, you see.

## ACT II

*The scene is unchanged, but it is evening. The curtains are drawn over the portholes, and the electric lights are on. The centre door is open from time to time, and it is pitch-black outside.*

*On the left is seated* MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. MR LINGLEY *is with her, seated at the table on the right.*

LINGLEY. Well, I'm feeling very much better.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I am so glad.

LINGLEY. I didn't quite catch your name at dinner. Being introduced during the soup has its disadvantages. The lady sitting next to us made it a little difficult to hear concisely.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Yes, I foresaw trouble with her this morning. Er—Mrs Midget.

LINGLEY. Thank you. I say, Mrs Midget——

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. No, no! No. *I* am Cliveden-Banks.

LINGLEY. I apologize. What strikes me is that this line can't be paying any dividends—— Why, there's nobody on board!

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Bother dividends as long as I'm comfortable!

LINGLEY. This I think *is* the best place.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Quite a jolly little snuggery. [*The* REV. WILLIAM DUKE *enters and comes down centre.*] At least it *was.*

LINGLEY. Join me in a cigar, Duke?

DUKE. Thank you.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*after a glance at* DUKE]. And I was so comortable. Where on earth can I go to now, I wonder? [*Rises.*

LINGLEY. Oh! don't go.

DUKE. I hope you are not leaving on my account?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Your hope is shattered, sir. I am.

DUKE. Mrs Cliveden-Banks, I don't know what I've done to offend ou. I can't help being a parson. But I do know that you'll make it ery uncomfortable for the others if you go on like this. So come, ook over my shortcomings just for the trip. Remember that "to err human, to forgive divine."

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Are you suggesting I have ever erred?

DUKE. In your case, I am certain such a thing would be impossible.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Oh! very well. I sacrifice myself for the thers' sake. I am a generous woman. How do you do? [*Shaking ands*] But remember, Mr Duke, if you *do* drown us all, I'll never speak o you again. [*Sits right.*

DUKE. Splendid! [*Sits right of table right.*] Now, where are those ther two? We might get up some bridge. We *must* all do something ur first night out.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. What other two do you mean?

DUKE. They—er—at dinner. They sat by themselves. Seemed wfully nice—quiet. I don't know their names—I think the girl's lled Ann.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Oh! that couple! Oh! dear! Did you like ne look of *them*?

DUKE. Yes, didn't you?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. No, I thought there was something funny out them.

LINGLEY. "Funny"?

DUKE. What do you mean by that?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I don't know. It just struck me they were nny. Not nice. I may be wrong. I hope I am. But that *is* my inion. Not nice. Funny.

[MRS MIDGET *wanders in from the deck. Now hatless.*

MRS MIDGET. May I come in?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Now I *shall* go.

DUKE [*rises*]. Yes, come in, Mrs Midget, come in.

MRS MIDGET [*entering*]. It's a bit lonely in the street.

DUKE. "Street"?

MRS MIDGET. Out there.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. She means the deck—how quaint!

DUKE. It's more cheerful in here, isn't it?

MRS MIDGET. Oh, much! [*Advancing left centre.*

DUKE. Sit down. You're not nervous, now, are you?

MRS MIDGET [*sits at table, left*]. Not of you, sir. You wear just the same sort of collar as our parson does. I wish I was back in the Lambeth Road.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*to* LINGLEY]. I can't stand the creature. I really can't—she's too impossible. I shall squash her. Good evening, Mrs Midget. We heard you at dinner. Very warm, this evening, isn't it?

MRS MIDGET. Yes, dearie. 'Ellish 'ot. Beggin' your Reverence's pardon. I've come out all of a sweat.

[*Wiping her neck with handkerchief.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Dear me! Have you really? How embarrassing! What a day you have had, haven't you? First of all you're struck into a heap and now you've come out all of a—yes, exactly Yet, I suppose you travel a great deal?

MRS MIDGET. Every day. Lambeth to the Bank and from the Bank back to Lambeth. Workin' in the City as I did—do.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. The City! How enthralling! Big financial interests, I presume?

MRS MIDGET. No—charrin'. And in the old times we always managed Margate in the summer. Nice spot, Margate, ain't it?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I know nothing against it. I have never been there, of course.

MRS MIDGET. Never been to Margate! [*To* DUKE] Would you believe it?

DUKE. Yes.

MRS MIDGET. Oh! you'd love Margate a treat, mum. What with the paddling and everything. Do you like coconuts?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Coconuts? Oh, good Lord, no!

MRS MIDGET. Ah! Then you mightn't like Margate. They grow very good ones there, though. At least they used to. Cors' I ain't been there since I lost all my money. Do you know, all of yer, believe me or believe me not, I once had a house of my very own.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How magnificent!

MRS MIDGET. Yes, wasn't it? Though of course it wasn't *all* my own. No. Semi-detached, and lodgers, yer know. Payin' guests, and very well it *did* pay for donkey's years. Well enough for me to make my son a gentleman anyway, and send him to a public school to prove it.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Quite romantic. Perhaps I have met your dear boy? Where is he now? Cambridge or Cologne?

MRS MIDGET. Well, 'avin' become a gentleman, 'e naturally lost all 'is money. And 'is money was my money. And I ain't seen him since.

'E hasn't seen me, not to know me, since 'e was a little boy. I got my brother-in-law, 'e's rich, to take him over and manage things for me. You see, I didn't want to disgrace 'im. 'E's been a good boy.

LINGLEY. Sounds it.

MRS MIDGET [*resentfully*]. 'E *was*, I tell yer. But you know what it is yerself, sir.

LINGLEY. I do not—I have never lost a penny in my life.

MRS MIDGET. Ah! then you can't be a gentleman.

LINGLEY. What?

MRS MIDGET. Now, the gentlemen my—my boy mixed with *were* gents. Always broke, bless 'em, and then 'avin' 'another one' just to make 'em forget about it. And my boy the life and soul of the 'ole crowd. At least so the letter told me from my brother-in-law. And you can't 'ave your cake and eat it, as the sayin' goes, nor your gin and drink it, *as* you well know, sir.

LINGLEY. Confound it, madam, I do *not* know.

DUKE. Sorrow's sent to try us, Mrs Midget.

MRS MIDGET. Cors' it's sent to try us. What else could it be sent for? And it does try us very much.

DUKE. Yes—but sometimes, as in your case——

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Mr Duke means you would never have the steady poise, you would not be the woman of the world you so obviously are, unless——

MRS MIDGET. You're trying to pull my leg, aren't you?

DUKE. I'm afraid Mrs Cliveden-Banks *was* trying to. I certainly didn't mean that.

MRS MIDGET. Thank you, sir. [*Rises and crosses centre to* MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS.] Mum, I may not know the manners of Society, and if them is such as yours I do *not* want to. With which terse remark I shuts up, being sorry for anything I've said. [*Moves up centre.*

DUKE. Yes, yes, quite, quite. Well, we must all *do* something, you know, time is getting on. What about those cards?

MRS MIDGET [*coming down right*]. Oh! I'd love a game o' nap. [*Sits.*] Mr Prior was only telling me this afternoon before 'e—well, 'e was telling me that 'e played cards.

LINGLEY. Prior—pooh!

MRS MIDGET. *I* like 'im, anyway.

DUKE. Very unfortunate—Prior—— Yes, yes, dear, dear, dear.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Poor Mr Prior! But I hear he's always like that nowadays. A thoroughly bad lot, in fact. Not that I would say so in public, of course—but just between ourselves, I mean. Oh! [*Laughs.*] What a sight he was, and what an exhibition he made of himself! I shall never forget it. Never! [*Laughs again.*] Mr

Lingley, he called you a—dear, dear me—I can't help smiling, but he called you a—[*laughs*] didn't he?

Lingley. Never mind what he called me, madam.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Well, you *are* rather like one, you know, if you don't mind my saying so. Where is he now, I wonder?

Lingley. Sleeping it off, if he's a wise man.

Duke. Which he isn't.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. He wasn't at dinner naturally. I expect you all noticed it.

Duke. Of course, of course. It's a great shame, a great pity. [Tom *enters; he is very pale, tense and very quiet.*] Ah! Prior!

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Mr Prior! Why, we were just talking about you——

Tom. Indeed.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Yes, I was only saying what a steady hand——

Tom. Don't waste any more of your breath than is absolutely necessary, Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Nor any of you either.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. I beg your pardon.

Duke. What's the matter now?

Tom. We're trapped, that's all.

Duke [*rises*]. Trapped!

Tom. Yes, trapped. Every one of us—all of us on this boat, we're done for.

Mrs Cliveden-Banks. What, *already*! [*Threateningly pointing to* Duke] Mr *Duke*!!

Tom. I mean it. You needn't believe me if you don't want to. It's true all the same. We're dead people.

Lingley. Oh, run away, run away, young man, and sleep it off.

Tom. I'm sober enough now. And the boat's not sinking. I don't mean that either.

Lingley. What the blazes *do* you mean, then, sir?

Tom. Duke, come here. Feel my pulse. Draw a chalk line on the floor and make me walk it if you want to. [Duke *moves up right of table to him.*] Look at my eyes. Now—I am sober, aren't I?

Duke. Yes, I think so.

Tom. The last time I heard a clergyman say "Yes, I think so" was on the music-halls. Funny I shall never go to a music-hall again.

Mrs Midget [*rises*]. Why doesn't some one put the poor young man to bed? It would be much kinder.

Tom. Quiet, please. I don't want to frighten you—any of you—but I feel—I ought to try and convince you. You admit I'm sober. You'll have to take my word I'm not mad.

Lingley. I should want more than your word for that.

TOM. You shall have it. You shall have the word of the—the man who calls himself a steward, and the words of two of our fellow-passengers. The two who, I see, are not here.

LINGLEY. But what about, sir? What are you driving at?

TOM [*comes down left centre*]. I began to suspect this morning before lunch. Nobody seemed to know where they were going to. I'd forgotten myself, though I didn't admit it. I didn't want to. I didn't dare to. I daren't now. When I was quite convinced I got drunk. That was only natural. All my life I've started to face facts by getting drunk. Well—when—when I woke up again—about an hour ago, you were all in the saloon. I was frightened, terribly frightened. At last I got out of my cabin and went over the ship. I made myself. Yes, over her, all over her. Into the officers' quarters and everything. No one said a word to me for a very simple reason. There's no one on board *to* say anything. No captain, no crew, no nothing.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. If there's *no* crew on board this ship, Mr Prior, may I ask who waited on *me* at dinner?

TOM. There's no one at all on board this ship, excepting we five—and those two—and the steward. *He* waited on you at dinner. He's in charge of the ship. Do you know where that steward is now? He's in the rigging—sitting cross-legged—high up in the rigging. I've just seen him.

MRS MIDGET. It's takin' 'im in a funny way, ain't it?

DUKE [*advancing on* TOM]. Really, Prior, I think that——

TOM [*turning to* DUKE]. I don't know what I'm talking about? Very well, then, answer me this. Who have you, any of you, seen on board this ship since she sailed? Excepting ourselves? Mrs Midget, perhaps you can help. [*Going to* MRS MIDGET] When I sent you to your stewardess this morning, did you see her?

MRS MIDGET. See who? I saw no one except the fellow I went with. And first rate he looked after me. Got me a cup of tea and——

TOM. I tell you I—— [*Turns to* DUKE] *Padre—padre*, think carefully. Who exactly have *you* spoken to?

DUKE. I—really, I—I have seen men about of course.

TOM. Have you? Have you indeed? What sort of men, sailors?

DUKE. Yes, I think so.

TOM. In the same way that you thought I was sober.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. You don't expect us to talk to sailors, do you, Mr Prior, able-bodied though they may be?

TOM. Have any of you met anybody else, then? A purser, an officer of any sort, even a stoker?

LINGLEY. That reminds me. In your gigantic tour of this vessel did you by any chance strike the engine-room?

TOM. No, I couldn't find it.

LINGLEY. A pity! I'd hoped you were going to say the ship was worked by elastic—ha, ha, ha! [MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS *laughs also.*

TOM. Joke if you want to. If that *is* a joke. Well, *padre*, speak up.

DUKE. Well, I—I must have met some one of course.

TOM. You *should* have met some one, you mean. But you've not. *Padre*, where are *you* landing?

DUKE. Landing? I'm going to—of course I'm going to—— Mind your own business.

TOM. *Where are you landing?*

DUKE. I'm taking a little holiday, that's all. I'm going first to—to——

TOM. You see you can't remember. I'm right! I knew I was. Why, look at the quiet way we sailed. Was anybody here to see any of us off? No, you know they weren't. Because you can't see people off—not right off—to where we're going.

LINGLEY. I wish you'd get out, sir, we want to play cards.

TOM. Cards—pah! Lingley, Lingley [*down to* LINGLEY], you're impossible! Why I should try and warn *you*, I don't know. Still, can you really, honestly tell me you've seen nothing queer about this boat?

LINGLEY. Nothing whatever—excepting you. She's exactly the same as any other boat—go away.

TOM. Is she? Is she indeed?

[HENRY *and* ANN *appear at the centre door and cross down left. They are as ever, close together, and almost always hand in hand, and aloof from the others.*

TOM. Well, I'll tell you one little thing I noticed about her that struck me as slightly different. This boat doesn't carry a port light—no—and she doesn't carry a starboard one, either! *Now* is she the same as any other? *Now* can you settle down to your cards?

LINGLEY. You *are* mad!

TOM. Go and look, then! Get on deck. You can find out if you go forward for yourself, and if you can see 'em—you're mad.

LINGLEY. I shouldn't make such a fool of myself.

TOM [*seeing* ANN *and* HENRY]. Ah!—you're just in time.

HENRY. What for?

TOM. To give these people their chance—to stop them making fools of themselves—to back me up.

HENRY. I don't quite follow.

TOM. You know—you knew this morning.

HENRY. Knew what?

TOM. You've been on deck?

HENRY. Just now.

TOM. Notice anything wrong? [*A pause.*

HENRY. What with?

TOM. Oh! don't pretend—don't lie to me.

HENRY. Really, I *don't* understand.

TOM. Then you don't understand how you got here either, I suppose? How either of you got here? [*Up to them.*] Gas, my dear sir, sheer gas.

ANN. Henry, don't speak to him! [*Moves down a step.*] He frightens me.

TOM. Yes, I suppose I do. I know as well, you see.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. He's trying to frighten us, that's all.

LINGLEY. Madam, I must apologize for our fellow-passenger He—he is not—ahem—well.

TOM [*moves down a step*]. Of course I'm not well. Under the circumstances I should have thought that would have been obvious.

LINGLEY [*rises*]. Mr Duke, I see an unpleasant duty will have to be performed. As a clergyman you must be more used to unpleasantness than any of us. Will you please perform it?

DUKE. What do you want me to do?

LINGLEY. Get him to the doctor—or lock him up.

[DUKE *moves slightly to centre door.*

TOM [*up to centre door*]. The doctor! I tell you there *is* no doctor. No one! And if you try any of that sort of thing on, I'll make trouble.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Oh, dear, how selfish!

TOM. But I tell you what you *can* do if you like——

LINGLEY. Well?

TOM. I'll make a bargain with you.

LINGLEY. What is it?

TOM. Go out there—one of you men and convince yourselves about those lights. Then if I'm wrong—well, I'll go quietly.

MRS MIDGET. That seems fair, poor fellow.

TOM. Well? What do you say? Mr Lingley, will you oblige?

LINGLEY. I should never dream of interfering with the ship's discipline.

TOM [*to* HENRY]. It's no good asking *you*, of course?

HENRY. No.

TOM. *Padre*—you're the only one left—what do you say?

DUKE. If I do it—just to satisfy you—you'll keep your word?

TOM. Yes.

DUKE. Very well, then.

LINGLEY. Preposterous! [*Sits down.*

TOM. Thank you. [DUKE *goes slowly to doorway.*] Oh! Duke, the truth.

DUKE. Of course. [DUKE *goes quietly out on to the deck.*

LINGLEY. Weak, weak.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Ah! the Church was always like that!

TOM. Don't you run the Church down so. Take my advice, you may want her help very badly before long. [*Sits left of table right.*] Wait until I'm proved right.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I simply ignore you, Mr Prior. You won't be right. That is why I ignore you.

[*The sound of a drum is faintly heard, a heavily muffled and mysterious and irregular beating.*

LINGLEY. Childish weak foolishness giving in to you. *I've* never given in to anyone. No one's ever given in to me. I should never expect them to. You're drunk, sir, and you're in the wrong, sir, and—— [*The drum stops.*

TOM. Quiet. [*Rises.*] I can hear something—out there.

HENRY. What is it?

TOM. Wait a minute—it's stopped now.

LINGLEY. I didn't hear anything.

TOM. I did. It sounded like a drum.

LINGLEY. A drum?

TOM. Yes. A muffled drum.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Very possibly it *was* a muffled drum.

LINGLEY. Very possibly it was imagination.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. What's the good of talking about things out there in the cold, anyway? Let's concentrate on making it nice and comfortable in here for our cards, [*to* TOM] which we hope to start the moment you've gone.

TOM [*moving towards her*] Mrs Cliveden-Banks, you're an ostrich! I'm sorry, but you are. You're in danger, great danger of something out there—something, I don't know what it is—but it may affect your very soul—yet all you can think about is light and warmth and cards in here. So the only word for you *is* ostrich.

LINGLEY [*smiling*]. Dear me, dear me, I can't help smiling, but he called you a—didn't he?

ANN [*looking out on to the deck*]. Oh! why doesn't he come back? [*In terrified impatience.*

HENRY. Steady, steady. [*To others*] My wife is easily upset. [*Draws her away from door left.*

MRS MIDGET. Poor dear!

LINGLEY. It's too bad of you, Prior.

TOM. Is it?

ANN. What has happened to him?

TOM. To whom?

ANN. The clergyman—of course.

TOM. Oh! Duke. Who knows? Perhaps he can't get back.

ANN. You don't think——

[*Drum starts again, beating irregularly, and a trifle more loudly.*

TOM. I don't think, because I don't know any more than you do. Hark! [*A pause.*] Listen, there it is again. The drum!

LINGLEY. Um! *I* must be getting deaf!

[DUKE *appears as if breathless—a pause. He is pale, agitated, and terrified—but tries to conceal it.*

TOM [*tensely anxious*]. Well—well?

LINGLEY. Well—speak, Mr Duke? [*A pause.*

ANN [*with a great effort at dissembling*]. It's—it's all right, of course?

LINGLEY. Duke? [*Another pause.*] It *is* all right?

DUKE. Of course.

LINGLEY. Everything?

DUKE. Everything. [*Drum stops.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I knew it would be all the time.

TOM [*rushing up and throwing himself on* DUKE]. You liar! You liar! Come with me—I'll show you. [*Grabs him by throat.*

[LINGLEY *rises.*

DUKE [*struggling with him*]. Prior! [MRS MIDGET *rises.* LINGLEY *seizes* TOM'S *neck.* ANN *and* HENRY *up left huddled together in alarm.*] You promised to go quietly.

TOM. You swore to tell the truth! *You clergyman,* you dirty liar!

DUKE. Got him, Lingley?

TOM [*struggling violently*]. I'll show you! No more lies! Now we're dead, you bloody liar! I won't be cheated! I *will* make you understand! I'm trying to help, I tell you—help us all!!!

LINGLEY. Be quiet, sir.

[*They bring* TOM *to chair left of table right. He sinks to chair, and with head buried in arms on table sobs hysterically but quietly—exhausted.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. If wanted, I'll be in the ladies' writing-room. [*Going left*] A long letter, you know, while the details are still fresh. [*Turns.*] Coming, dear? [*Sees she is speaking to* MRS MIDGET. *Turns at door.*] Oh, no! [*She goes out with her nose in the air.*

[MRS MIDGET *crosses and exits left, following* MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. *All stand quietly for a moment's pause.*

HENRY [*to* ANN]. Dear?

ANN [*as she goes*]. I'll wait on deck.

LINGLEY [*to* HENRY]. Shut those doors. [HENRY *closes centre door.*] *And now, sir!*

DUKE [*coming down to* PRIOR]. Prior, I apologize.

LINGLEY. What do you mean?

DUKE. That Mr Prior was perfectly right.

LINGLEY. What?

DUKE. There *is* no—there's no starboard—no——

LINGLEY. There's *not*!

DUKE. No. There's no light on the boat at all. She's as black as pitch.

LINGLEY. Impossible.

DUKE. Look for yourself.

LINGLEY [*alarmed now, crosses to centre door, opens it, and glances out into the dark, then shuts it. Then hesitates and turns*]. But—the bridge?

DUKE. As far as I could see there's nothing—nothing anywhere.

LINGLEY. Nothing—nobody?

DUKE. I'm not even certain that we're moving.

LINGLEY [*coming back*]. Good heavens, man, why didn't you tell us this at once?

DUKE. I didn't want to alarm the ladies.

LINGLEY. Women drown as easily as men.

DUKE. Is this a question of drowning? Something must be done—we must all *do* something immediately. [*Sits right of table right.*

TOM. Exactly, but what?

LINGLEY [*thoroughly rattled*]. To begin with—well—somebody—somebody ought to ring a bell.

TOM. And get some one else to explain.

LINGLEY. Duke—do you—do you believe in all this?

DUKE. I don't understand it.

LINGLEY [*to* HENRY]. And you, sir?

HENRY. I don't understand it either.

TOM. That's not true! [*Rises.*] And you know it's not true!

DUKE. Prior! Now look here, when did you first feel certain, in your mind, about all this?

TOM [*pointing at* HENRY—*sits on table*]. After I'd heard something he said. I spoke to the steward, I asked him if—he told me the truth, I'm sure—it seems we're sailing for [*pause*]—both hell and heaven.

DUKE. Very interesting from a professional point of view, of course.

TOM. If there's anything else you want to know better ask *him, the steward.*

DUKE. Where is he now, I wonder?

LINGLEY. Still sitting high up in the rigging, I expect.

TOM. Don't be sarcastic! He was there.

LINGLEY. Was he? [*Rises, takes one step towards* TOM.] Then how did you see him if it's all dark outside?

TOM [*vaguely*]. That never struck me. But he was there.

[SCRUBBY *enters, softly strolls across towards centre.*

DUKE [*rises*]. We must hurry. Whilst we're talking like this we may be drifting on to the rocks—crashing into something or——

SCRUBBY [*always very kindly, very quiet, and compassionate—like a tolerant elder to children*]. No, sir, you won't do that.

LINGLEY. Now look here, my man. What is all this nonsense? I can't stand excitement. My doctor ordered rest and quiet. Where's the captain? Take me to him!

SCRUBBY. Oh, he left long ago, sir.

LINGLEY. Enough of that! Understand? By gad, when I get back to London I'll report——

SCRUBBY. I'm afraid you won't get back to London, sir——

LINGLEY No more of your impertinence! Take me to the captain! —do you hear?—you're only a damned servant—take me to him——

DUKE. Mr Lingley, I think we should *all* keep our tempers.

SCRUBBY. That's all right, sir, I've known a lot of them to get angry at first.

LINGLEY. A lot of whom?

SCRUBBY. People like you, sir, who are just beginning.

LINGLEY. Beginning?

SCRUBBY. To be passengers.

TOM. What you told me this morning *was* true, wasn't it?

SCRUBBY. That we're dead, sir? Yes, quite dead, if that's what you mean.

LINGLEY. You speak for yourself.

DUKE. It *is* queer. [*Sits right of table right.*

SCRUBBY. Why, sir? We didn't think it was queer when we were born.

LINGLEY. Now listen. I don't want any mysteries.

SCRUBBY. There are none, sir.

LINGLEY. And I mean to get in touch with some one at once—ah! I have it, the wireless!

SCRUBBY. She doesn't carry any, sir.

LINGLEY. That's illegal anyway! Duke? [*A pause.*] Duke?

DUKE. I'm afraid I can't suggest anything.

LINGLEY. But—but——! [*Suddenly overcome with fear.*] I must get out of this—I must get out of it.

SCRUBBY. That, sir, is impossible until after the examination.

LINGLEY. What examination?

SCRUBBY. You'll find out later, sir.

LINGLEY. The ladies ought to be warned immediately.

SCRUBBY. I should leave them to find out for themselves, sir, if I were you. I have known some of them not to like the idea to begin

with, and get hysterical. It is kinder to let them find out for themselves.

DUKE. They will find out?

SCRUBBY. Undoubtedly, sir.

LINGLEY [*suddenly seeing* HENRY]. Damn it—don't stand there saying nothing—get upset!

HENRY. I am—of course.

LINGLEY. You're a bright lot, all of you, aren't you? So helpful—but—but—what are we to do? What are we to do? [*To* DUKE] *You're* always talking about doing things. What are we to do?

DUKE. I really—don't know. Of course, if we were all quite certain—a prayer——

LINGLEY. Is praying going to bring the captain or the crew to life?

TOM. Or any of us, for that matter.

SCRUBBY. There's no danger, gentlemen, if *that's* what you're frightened of.

LINGLEY. Isn't there?

SCRUBBY. No, sir.

LINGLEY. *I'm* not frightened.

DUKE. I am. How many times have *you* made this passage, steward?

SCRUBBY. About five thousand times, sir.

LINGLEY. Five——

SCRUBBY. Yes. I was lost young.

DUKE. And it's always been like this?

SCRUBBY. Not always, sir. No. As I was telling this gentleman [*referring to* PRIOR], the passengers don't find out so quickly as a rule. I suppose it's because of the 'half-ways' we've got on board this trip.

DUKE. 'Half-ways'?

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir, it sometimes *does* work like that.

LINGLEY. There is no point in standing here talking to a lunatic. The question is—what is——?

SCRUBBY. To be done? That's what they *all* ask, sir. There's *nothing* to be done. Just go on as if nothing had happened.

TOM. How simple!

SCRUBBY. Quite, sir, quite. You'll find everything simple now, until it comes to the examination.

LINGLEY. Don't talk to me as if I were a schoolboy.

SCRUBBY. It *is* rather like going to school, sir.

LINGLEY. Stop! It's all right. Everything's all right. I've solved the whole thing suddenly.

HENRY. Have you?

[*Still up left aloof.*

LINGLEY. Of course I have. I'm asleep. I'm safe really. I'm simply asleep.

TOM. What am I?—part of the nightmare?

LINGLEY. I've had dreams like this before. Go away, go away, all you people. It's no good you waiting! I'm Lingley of Lingley, Limited. Not one of you can touch me. I turned myself into a company years ago. Only go away now. [*A pause, and then he turns to the steward.*] *I am asleep*, aren't I?

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir—sound asleep—or just waking.

LINGLEY. Good, good. Now get away, get away, all you people. I shall go. I will go. [*Crosses to door left.*] Isn't that lucky! I *can* go. You know, in *some* dreams you *can't*. [LINGLEY *walks off left.*

SCRUBBY [*following him*]. Don't worry, gentlemen, I'll look after him. [SCRUBBY *follows him.*

DUKE. A good sleep would be the very best thing for Lingley.

TOM. Would it?

DUKE. Eh?

TOM. Well, I mean—you know—would it help now?

DUKE. Oh! yes, of course—I'd forgotten—I really don't know. I—I don't understand. I'm quite a young man, and there's such a lot of work to be done after my holiday.

TOM. Try some of this whisky—it still seems to work.

DUKE [*rises*]. No, I don't think I will, if you'll excuse me, in case we—we meet anyone.

TOM [*toying idly with glass*]. I'm awfully sorry. I'm afraid I'm a fearful rotter, I'm so used to it. Any crises you—— [*He puts down the glass. Both sit on front of table.*] I say—I say—— [*Pause.*] Charles Reade—or some other rotten novelist—once said "Never too late to mend," didn't he? Do you think there's any truth in novels? And then there was that other chap—the Great One, you know, in the Bible, He said—He—— There you are, you see; that's the sort of fellow I am! I've forgotten what *He* said.

DUKE. Does it really much matter what either of them said? Isn't it more to the point what *you* have got to say?

TOM. No sermons! But, if you please, I would like to talk to you seriously if you'd listen to me, out there in the dark.

DUKE [*rises*]. Shall we go out there—in the dark—and talk to each other, shipmate?

TOM [*humorously*]. This is a great chance for *you*, isn't it?

DUKE. We must both, my dear Prior, keep our sense of humour. [*Moves up to door centre. To* HENRY *at door*] Coming out, sir? [*With* TOM *to door arm in arm.*

HENRY. No, not yet. [*Still up left.*

DUKE. See you later, then. [*He goes out.*

HENRY. Yes.

TOM. I say, your wife's out there, isn't she?

HENRY. Yes.

TOM. Shall I send her to you?

HENRY. Oh—thank you.

TOM [*returning a step from door*]. You must have known, or you wouldn't have let her be out there alone.

HENRY. I knew *nothing*. I know nothing now. Good night.

TOM. I suppose so.

[*He walks out on to the deck and disappears. There is a pause, and then* HENRY *calls "Ann." Another pause. He calls again.* ANN *enters from the deck.*

HENRY. Ann—— [*A pause.*] Come here.

[*Crosses right to above table.*

ANN. What is it? [*She goes to left of* HENRY.

HENRY. Come here.

ANN. I'm with you.

HENRY. Ann—listen—they know we're dead—they're—they're finding out our secret.

ANN [*frightened*]. I know! I know they are!

[*They look at each other.*

HENRY. What will they *do* to us, dear?

ANN [*getting closer to him*]. They won't separate us—will they?

## ACT III

### SCENE I

*It is an afternoon some days later. There is a small table near the bar with a water-carafe and a glass, a hand-bell, and papers on it. Chairs are arranged round it in a circle, as if for a meeting. Otherwise the scene is unchanged.*

MR LINGLEY *is pacing up and down the room in an agitated manner, watch in hand.*

LINGLEY. Four thirty—four thirty-*one*! Tut, tut, tut! [*Goes to table.*] Late, late. Now let's see—— [*Counting the chairs*] Mrs Cliveden-Banks—Mr Duke—two—four—six—— [*Touching armchair at head and fingering water-bottle*] Myself here—yes, that's right. [*The siren is heard. Takes out watch again.*] Four thirty-one and a half—four thirty-*two*. Oh, tut, tut, tut! [TOM *walks in from the deck.* LINGLEY *stops in his walk on seeing him.*] Good gracious, fancy *you* being the first!

TOM. First for what?

LINGLEY. The meeting, sir!

TOM. Oh, I'd forgotten about your rotten old meeting.

LINGLEY. Where are the others?

TOM. On deck. It may interest you to know we've just sighted land. [*Sits above table.*

LINGLEY. Land, Mr Prior? Land! [*Delighted.*

TOM. Yes. We've just sighted *bell.*

LINGLEY. Oh!

TOM. It looks quite a jolly little spot from here. The *padre's* arranging a sweepstake on the exact time it will take us to get in. He's suddenly developed a sense of humour.

LINGLEY. Sense of humour and sweeptakes when we're all—all——! What's the use of a sense of humour to a dead man?

[*Pacing to and fro, up and down.*

TOM. I dunno! I've never asked one.

LINGLEY. Oh, why don't they *come*?

TOM. You're getting the wind up a bit, aren't you? Oh, I don't blame you, Lingley of Lingley, Limited, for I shouldn't be surprised if over there a nice private little gridiron isn't being warmed up for your personal reception. [*Goes to table and sits down.*

LINGLEY. Will you be quiet, you foolish boy! [SCRUBBY *enters left.*

SCRUBBY [*indicating the table*]. Everything correct, sir?

LINGLEY. Eh?

SCRUBBY. Enough chairs, sir?

LINGLEY. Oh! yes, very nice indeed, very nice, Mr Scrubby. Er—here is half a crown for your trouble. Thank you.

SCRUBBY. Thank *you*, sir.

LINGLEY. What for? Half a crown is no use to me now. Wait! Please tell the others—the others—my shipmates—that they're late for the meeting.

SCRUBBY [*as he goes*]. Certainly, sir.

LINGLEY. Thank you, Mr Scrubby, thank you

TOM. What's the object of this meeting, anyway?

LINGLEY. Can't you see?

TOM. Yes. That's why I asked.

LINGLEY. We're approaching our destination, and I want to make this one last effort. I feel we should talk the matter over in a rational spirit—and as a business man I've called this meeting.

TOM. You would. And, as has probably been your custom, you think that a committee report and minutes, and balance-sheets and all that bunkum, may impress this examiner as they do shareholders and *other* examiners. Of course you'll be chairman?

LINGLEY. Naturally. I seem to be the only one qualified.

TOM. You admit it.

LINGLEY. By right of experience and proved ability—— Prior, when I was a boy——

TOM. Were you ever a boy? Poor parents!

LINGLEY. When I was seventeen I could only manage one egg for breakfast.

TOM. I can never manage *any* breakfast myself.

LINGLEY. *Afford* one egg, I mean. At six-thirty A.M. I used to walk to my work.

TOM. On the egg?

LINGLEY. And after business I'd walk home again. That was the beginning of Lingley, Limited. When I was seventeen I made my motto "Try to rely on yourself." At thirty-seven I made it "Rely on yourself."

TOM. So you fired *me*.

LINGLEY. At forty-seven I made it "Rely on yourself *absolutely*"; because if you fail all your friends will only say "It serves you right."

TOM. *Had* you any friends at forty-seven?

LINGLEY. You're incorrigible! And I thought *you* were concerned in this—this dilemma.

TOM. I *am*.

[MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS *enters through the centre door. She is in the very deepest mourning.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I must apologize for being late! I've been playing sweepstake.

LINGLEY. Mrs Cliveden-Banks! Why this dress?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Our present circumstances!

[TOM *sits—his attitude toward the subsequent proceedings is one of contempt.*

LINGLEY. Will you sit here?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. It's nice to be able to, isn't it? [*Sits in the first chair left of table.*] And the object of this meeting, Mr Lingley, is—er——?

LINGLEY. Well—er—is this company alive or dead?

TOM. And the next question on the agenda?

LINGLEY [*a pause. Sits*]. What is going to happen to us? Mr Prior—as a prospective shareholder—I ask you what you think?

TOM. Lingley—do you know anything about Elizabethan furniture?

LINGLEY. Nothing whatever.

TOM. Neither do I. That's why I never talk about it.

LINGLEY. But it is the right thing to do, isn't it?

TOM. To solemnly sit down and discuss if we've immortal souls or if we haven't? And if we have, to pool 'em. [*Sarcastically*] Un-

doubtedly. [*Rises.*] "We must combine"—the most hopeful refuge for an embarrassed business man like you.

LINGLEY. Exactly. We must all face this examiner together.

[*The* REV. WILLIAM DUKE *enters. He is quite different, and most cheerful.*

DUKE. Hello, Tom! Hello, Lingley! [*To* MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS] Hello, Banky!

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Banky!

DUKE. Yes. [*He shakes her shoulders.*] Banky, Banky! We're dead now, so my job's over and I can be quite natural; do what I like and say what I like, Banky. [*Over* LINGLEY's *right shoulder*] Prior, have you heard this one—I've been dying to spring it for ages—"There was a young girl of Hong-Kong——"

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*convulsed with laughter*]. Oh, *I* know that one.

LINGLEY. Sir! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. We are about to hold a board meeting.

DUKE. Sorry. I overheard one of my ex-choirboys reciting that in the vestry. I remember his voice was breaking at the time. Damn badly. [*Sits below* TOM.

LINGLEY. Supposing your bishop heard you say "damn."

DUKE. Impossible, unless he's listening in.

LINGLEY. You've evidently become unbalanced.

MRS MIDGET [*entering centre*]. Is this the meeting-'ouse?

LINGLEY. Yes, Mrs Midget. Sit here, will you? Very good of you to come. I hope you—your family are well and——

MRS MIDGET [*sits above table right of* LINGLEY]. What the 'ell are you talking about?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Please do not mention hell, Mrs Midget, it's a rather ticklish subject at the moment.

LINGLEY. Now, are we all here?

TOM. We're all here.

MRS MIDGET. The young couple aren't 'ere.

LINGLEY. *They* never say anything, anyway. Shall we begin?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Begin.

LINGLEY. Very well, then. [*Rises.*] Ahem! [*Rings bell on table.*

TOM. They're off!

LINGLEY. Ladies and gentlemen——

MRS MIDGET. 'Ear, 'Ear!

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Be quiet!

MRS MIDGET. I was only thanking 'im for the compliment.

LINGLEY. Ladies *and* gentlemen—*de mortuis nil nisi bonum.*

TOM. Oh, get on with it!

LINGLEY. I intend to. *Ladies* and gentlemen—I am a business man.

DUKE. Quite.

LINGLEY. I have never done anything in my life without a reason.

DUKE. Quite.

LINGLEY. I would like firstly, therefore, to explain that my reason for calling this meeting is, if I may put it in this manner, to draw up a clean balance-sheet.

DUKE. Quite.

LINGLEY. Now, secondly—if I may say so——

TOM. You may say anything you like, old boy, only for goodness' sake say it.

LINGLEY. Sir! I——

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Order, please. Order.

TOM. I'll have the same, with a splash.

LINGLEY. Oh, please don't all keep interrupting.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Well, they always say "order" at meetings——

DUKE. Quite!

LINGLEY. Where was I?

DUKE. Drawing up a balance-sheet.

TOM. "Laughter."

LINGLEY. And trying to explain my reason for doing so.

DUKE. Quite.

TOM. Quite *what*?

LINGLEY. My reasons——

TOM. *Have* you any?

LINGLEY [*sits down in disgust*]. I shall say no more.

TOM. *Good.*

MRS MIDGET. Oh, sir, don't rob the gentleman of his amusement! 'E may not 'ave much more opportunity.

LINGLEY. I only thought in view of the shortness of time at our command, *and* the nature of the harbour we are rapidly approaching —I shall therefore call on Mr Duke for a few words. He should, professionally, know more of the matter than we do. Ahem! The Reverend W. Duke, M.C.

DUKE [*without rising*]. All I can say is—if we *are* all dead, then let us hope we have done our jobs to the best of our ability.

LINGLEY. I've never been late for an appointment in my life.

DUKE. And now that we're nearing this—this dread examiner, we think something should be done. And we've put off really thinking what to do till the last moment. Naturally we *would*, we're all English.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Rule, Britannia!

DUKE. You ask for my professional advice! I have none to give. The steward himself has none to give.

MRS MIDGET. You might pray for us, sir.

DUKE. I would if I thought my prayer would be worth anything. But I don't understand. To pray for something one doesn't understand is to be an idolator.

MRS MIDGET. Oh, we mustn't be one of those.

DUKE. It's the first time in my—it's the first *time* I've never known what to do. It's a strange business, this being dead. [*The drum is heard again.* ANN *and* HENRY *appear in the centre. A pause, and then* DUKE *notices the couple.*] Oh, come in. [ANN *and* HENRY *come in and stand away from the others.*] By the way, I suppose we're all agreed on that point?

LINGLEY. What point?

TOM. Ask these two.

LINGLEY. What point?

DUKE. *Are we all dead, or are we not?*

LINGLEY. That's what I called this meeting to decide. [*To* ANN *and* HENRY] You two, won't you sit down? [*No reply, they simply huddle closer together, and stand aloof left.*] No? No. Very well, then. The motion in front of us is, I think, perfectly plain to all. "Are we——" Who will speak first?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I will. For I think it's a most impertinent question to be asked. If I am dead, why can't I be dead in private? Personally I believe I *am* dead. My corsets have never fitted so comfortably, anyway.

LINGLEY. Mr Prior?

TOM. I *know*. And I don't care a damn one way or the other.

LINGLEY. Mr Duke?

DUKE. Agreed. Mr Lingley?

LINGLEY [*pause*]. I agree. Mrs Midget?

MRS MIDGET. Ladies and gents, all I want to know is this, and I really don't know what's goin' on. But if it '*as* 'appened—it would greatly please me to know that I've been *done proper*.

LINGLEY. I beg your pardon.

MRS MIDGET. You know, the street, the neighbours, the sherry wine and cake—and flowers.

LINGLEY. This is beside the point—do you think you're dead or do you not?

MRS MIDGET. Oh, I leave it entirely to you, sir.

LINGLEY. I take it in favour of the motion. And now you two young people?

TOM. They know. They've always known.

LINGLEY. Please, please, let them answer for themselves. Well? Well, what do you say?

HENRY. We have nothing to say.

LINGLEY. I suppose we must disregard your evidence. As far as the rest of us are concerned, I think there is nothing more to be done than to enter the verdict that this board [*commences to write*] "certifies itself to be dead." And the next thing for me to decide—is the most effective way—in all our interests—to meet and talk with this examiner.

TOM. Do you mean we want to get out of it if we can?

LINGLEY. If we can. Well—er—if we can't—we want to get out of it as lightly as we can.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Go on.

LINGLEY. And we're under a great disadvantage. You see we do not know what sort of a person this examiner is, who is suddenly to pounce upon us. He is bound to be a hard, stern business man. In which case, I suggest I am one best fitted to deal with him.

TOM. Hear, hear!

DUKE. Supposing he isn't anything like that? Supposing he is something even *you* can't understand? Supposing he is really *the* examiner? Don't you think we all ought to speak for ourselves?—if we can.

LINGLEY. It's if we *can't* I'm thinking of.

DUKE. I wish we knew. I certainly wish we knew.

[SCRUBBY *enters from behind bar.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Why not ask that steward person about him? They must have met before.

TOM. Not a bad idea at all, Mrs Cliveden-Banks.

LINGLEY. The steward! Exactly, will some one go and fetch him?

SCRUBBY. You want *me*, sir?

LINGLEY. What the——!

SCRUBBY. I have been here all the time.

LINGLEY. But we——

SCRUBBY. You wanted to ask me about the examiner, sir.

LINGLEY. Yes, if you would be so good.

SCRUBBY. What did you want to know exactly, sir?

LINGLEY. Well, he can't be tipped, that of course is obvious—but between ourselves—what sort of a person is he?

SCRUBBY. I can't say. I don't know. It all depends.

LINGLEY. Depends on what?

SCRUBBY. Yourselves, sir. I have seen some men and women before him cry for—but no, I can't say.

LINGLEY. Tell us just this, Mr Scrubby, what do you think we really ought to do—how exactly should we approach him?

SCRUBBY. I have been asked that question nearly five thousand times,

sir; I have always answered that it is better to leave the approaching to him. [*Starts to go out centre.*

DUKE. Scrubby, have I any chance?

SCRUBBY [*standing in door silhouetted against the golden light outside*]. You *all* have chances, sir.

DUKE. What's he like?

SCRUBBY. He's the wind and the skies and the earth, sir. He knows the furthest eddy of the high tide up the remotest cove. He knows the simpleness of beauty and the evilest thoughts of the human mind. He'll know all your evil thoughts.

DUKE [*quickly*]. God!

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir, he will. [*Looks out on to the deck.*] Would you excuse me now, please. I can tell no more; and a seagull has just fallen on to the deck. I'm afraid it may have broken its wing. If so I must try and mend it.

ANN. Poor thing!

SCRUBBY. Yes, madam, it's very sad the way the birds die in these strange waters. [*He walks off along the deck.*

DUKE. Just like the first day at school again.

TOM. *Now* do you want to deal with him—collectively? Or will you just make yourself responsible for your own sins?

LINGLEY. Oh, come, come, come! We mustn't all get jumpy. I still think we ought to be prepared, though my own conscience is perfectly clear.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Then you'd better worry about *ours*, dear Mr Lingley. Come, tabulate us, as it were.

LINGLEY. Excellent. Then I can put all the cases before this—this examiner briefly, and to the point.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. It should save us a great amount of trouble.

LINGLEY. So, if you will all just give me a few details about yourselves—and any special little reference you might like me to bring forward. Mrs Cliveden-Banks, let me start with you. What shall I say about *you* to this—er—examiner?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I should just say I am—or *was*—Mrs Cliveden-Banks—and leave it at that.

LINGLEY. Um! Oh, very well. You, Mrs Midget?

MRS MIDGET. Oh, I dunno.

LINGLEY. Oh, dear, dear, dear! Is that really all?

MRS MIDGET. Yes, please, sir.

LINGLEY. All right—not at all satisfactory, but I suppose all right—in my hands. I can answer for myself, of course. You, Mr Prior?

TOM. Oh, say I'm an old drunk. Or rather a young one

LINGLEY. That won't help you very much.

TOM. How do *you* know?

LINGLEY. But you must have had some redeeming qualities that will help you? For instance, were you good to your mother or—did you go to Oxford?

TOM. Put down the truth—he will know it, anyway.

LINGLEY. Really, you're none of you being very helpful. [*Writes.*] A drunk—er—a Mrs Cliveden-Banks—er—and an I dunno.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I should prefer to precede the drunk.

LINGLEY. Very well. [*To* HENRY] Now, sir, how can *you* assist me?

HENRY. I can't.

LINGLEY. But—you then, madam?

ANN. He speaks for both of us.

HENRY. We have nothing to say.

LINGLEY. It is really most discourteous of you! Mr Duke, I can rely on *you*, at any rate.

DUKE. You can rely on me for *one* piece of information.

LINGLEY. Thank you very much.

DUKE. I now entirely agree with Mr Prior for calling you a pompous old idiot!

TOM. Cheers.

LINGLEY. What?—just because I'm trying to do my duty!

DUKE. Your duty! Your rubbish! You're doing what you are because you're in a blue funk! And I don't blame you. I'm in a blue funk too! But not such a cerulean blue funk as to make an utter ass of myself by trying to get out of this with balance-sheets and board meetings! You want to try and impress this examiner with your cleverness, your business importance, your supposed interest in your fellow-creatures. You're hoping to save your own skin that way. And I think it's pretty rotten!

LINGLEY. Indeed. Destructive criticism is very simple.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Exactly! Look at a mad elephant.

LINGLEY [*to* DUKE]. Then perhaps *you* can advise me.

DUKE. I can advise nothing.

LINGLEY. 'Um! That's *very* useful.

MRS MIDGET. Oh, sir, not just *one* word of 'elp?

DUKE. That is different. If I can *help* I will. But you mustn't take anything I say in the nature of advice. The blind leading the blind, you know. I can only tell you what I am going to do myself, and I may be wrong

TOM. *What* are you going to do, Duke? [*Staccato.*

DUKE. I have been trying to look into myself silently, trying to examine my past thoughtfully and humbly—to seek out all the faults, and not try to excuse them. But to know all that I am responsible

for; and when I see my life, lying before me like a blurred map, I am going to pray to be able to make one more prayer. But for myself, I am not fit to pray for others. If any of you care to do likewise please do so if it will comfort you. Look back.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I *could* look back, of course, but I don't intend to. Remember Mrs Lot.

MRS MIDGET. Thank you, sir.

DUKE. No, no, now that's just what I didn't *want* you to do. You see, Mrs Midget—try to understand—we're just shipmates, you and I —trying to help one another. I'm not a captain any longer, I cannot pray for others. Perhaps the realization of that is the beginning of my punishment. I've *lost* my job.

LINGLEY. I don't suppose it was worth much, anyway.

DUKE. It was the most glorious job in the world. I suppose a man never really knows he's incompetent until he's sacked, and I can't, I can't understand, and I *ought* to. It's my *job* to; and it's beastly hard *not* to be able to. It's heartbreaking—it's—— [*To* PRIOR] Give me a cigarette.

[*The siren is heard again.* HENRY *moves away from* ANN.

LINGLEY. Well, let's get down to hard facts—I suggest——

DUKE. Too late. Didn't you hear?

LINGLEY. What?

ANN. *I* heard.

TOM. What?

DUKE. The siren.

TOM [*after a pause suddenly hysterical*]. I didn't hear anything—I didn't hear anything.

[DUKE *and* TOM *rise.* TOM *knocks chair over.*

DUKE. Now, now, Prior.

TOM. I didn't, I didn't! [*Another pause.*] But I can feel something, though, can't you?

DUKE. No.

TOM. The boat's stopped.

DUKE. Exactly. We're in. [*Another pause. The siren is repeated.*

TOM. No, no! I won't face it! I daren't! It's all been bluff on my part! Let me get away! Let me get——!

DUKE [*rising with hand on* PRIOR]. Prior, my boy!

TOM. I can't face it. I want to get away! Make the boat go on!

ANN. Henry! [*She gets closer to him.*

TOM. Let me get away. [*Struggling to get away.*

DUKE. We can none of us get away. We've stopped for good now. This is the judgment.

TOM [*pulling himself together*]. No, it can't be. Here in the smoke-room of a liner?

DUKE. Why *shouldn't* it be here in the smoke-room of a liner? Have any of us really ever troubled very much to think where-and-how-and-when it might be?

ANN [*quietly*]. Henry. They won't *separate* us—they *can't*

[HENRY *merely holds her closer, as if in defiance.*

DUKE. We're for it now all right.

[DUKE *sits right of table with his face buried in his hands.*

TOM. We must stick together. Duke, man, you *must* pray, even if the words are meaningless. Don't desert duty at the last moment. We're in the night, and I want a prayer. I want a prayer from a man. I don't care if he's a clergyman or not.

MRS MIDGET [*going to* DUKE]. You *ought* to pray, your Reverence.

TOM. Even if you can't understand what for—you understand *us*.

DUKE. You really think I ought to, Mrs Midget?

MRS MIDGET [*bending over him*]. Yes, sir, pardon the liberty. There's no 'arm in 'abits—if they're *good* 'abits; and prayer *is* a good 'abit.

DUKE [*without rising—but slowly facing front and with utter simplicity and sincerity*]. Forgive me, then, for I don't know—"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child—children—pardon our simplicity, suffer us to come to Thee. God bless Father and Mother, Harriet (she was my nurse), all kind friends, make me a good boy. Amen." That was the first prayer I ever learnt, so it's probably the finest. Say it to yourselves if you want to; and remember—Harriet—she was a worthy soul.

ANN [*after a long pause*]. Henry, let's hide.

[*She takes his hand and they drift off together, left.*

MRS MIDGET. I feel better.

[SCRUBBY *enters from the left, giving a glance back as he does so.*

SCRUBBY [*brightly—and businesslike*]. We're in, ladies and gentlemen, we're in.

DUKE. Yes, yes, we know.

SCRUBBY. The examiner is just coming on board. His cutter's alongside. He'll *be* with you in a second.

[*He goes out on to the deck.*

DUKE. We can do nothing now.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*in a whisper*]. Mr Lingley—Mr Lingley!

[*She and* LINGLEY *have gone to wall-seat at back—where they sit.*

LINGLEY. Well?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Well—hadn't we better all stand up?

[*All rise.*

LINGLEY. Eh? Oh, yes, of course, it would be more polite.

DUKE. Politeness!

SCRUBBY [*appearing and announcing*]. The examiner!

TOM [*quickly and quietly appealing*]. Duke!

DUKE. Quiet.

[*The* REV. FRANK THOMSON *is heard shouting off, right.*

THOMSON. Hello, hello, hello, there I say! Where is every one? Where are you, Duke? [*He appears in the centre. An elderly and massive clergyman, rotund, rubicund, and jovial. He is dressed in white drill and a topee. But he wears a clergyman's collar and black bib.*] Ah, there you are! Duke, my old boy, how are you?

DUKE. Good——! My——! Well——! Well, I'm dashed, if it isn't old Grease Spot. [*Crossing and shaking hands.*

THOMSON. It is, sir, and greasier than ever. Phew! This climate! Well, I am glad to see you after all this time. How are you, Duke? Have a good passage? You're looking fit.

[*Taking off topee and wiping forehead.*

DUKE. I'm not *feeling* it.

THOMSON. I only heard this morning your boat was due in this afternoon—I'd seen your name on the passenger list, of course—so I hurried down especially to meet you. I'd been up-country.

[*Sits above table.*

DUKE. Thank you.

THOMSON. Well, how goes everything? I'm bursting for news! How's Fergusson—still in the same old place?

DUKE. No, they've made him a bishop now.

THOMSON. Good Lor', they *would*. Well, I hope he likes it. And what's become of Maltby, and that little fellow with the red hair and spectacles? I never could remember his name. [*Lights a cigarette.*] And do you still go for your blow-out at Simpson's every pay-day, you young rascal? Tell me, what's the meat like there now?

DUKE [*greatly agitated, and in no mood for* THOMSON's *frivolity*]. Thomson, I'm delighted to see you again, of course, and I'm dying to tell you everything afterwards—*if I can*—but can't you realize—at this moment—how terribly worried I am?

THOMSON. Worried—worried about what?

DUKE. This—this person.

THOMSON. What person?

DUKE. This person—or whoever it is—who's just coming to examine us.

THOMSON. The examiner! Oh, I shouldn't worry about him!

DUKE. What—do—you—mean?

THOMSON. *I'm* the examiner! [*General movement.*

DUKE. You—you are!

THOMSON. Well, I'm one of 'em, anyway. We've got dozens on the job. And they *will* shove all the duds on to it. My dear boy, our

profession is not what it used to be. Terribly overcrowded, too, believe me.

DUKE. You're—my—examiner?

THOMSON. Yes—you're under *my* orders now. And I tell you, my boy, you'll have to mind your *p*'s and *q*'s; and *how* you'll have to slog at it! But I've fixed your 'digs' up for you all right. They're not up to much, but clean, in the same house as myself; the old woman's quite a decent sort. And it's near your work, right in the centre of the parish, so you couldn't do better, really.

DUKE. *Work?*

THOMSON. I find it quite handy myself.

DUKE. "Parish—slog at it." Thomson, Thomson, you don't mean I haven't lost my job after all? Don't torture me, tell me quickly.

THOMSON. Of course you haven't lost it. You haven't started it yet. You're just beginning it.

DUKE. Not lost my job? Still got my job. Oh, thank you! Oh, thank God! I will work harder now every moment, I swear I will, Mr Thomson. Harder than ever! Oh, do you all hear? My job I was so keen on—it's not been taken from me after all. My—oh!—[*sits right of table, left, and quietly cries*]—job.

THOMSON [*patting him on the shoulder*]. There, there, boy, there, there! Whatever made you think it would be taken from you? [DUKE *sobs.*] There, there, it's quite all right.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*at back on the seat with* LINGLEY]. I'm very glad to see they know each other so well—but what about us?

LINGLEY. This might be a suitable moment to approach him.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Try.

LINGLEY. I will [*importantly crossing to examiner, who takes no notice*]. Sir—ahem—my name is Lingley—of Ling——

THOMSON. Go away.

LINGLEY. I have advocated myself—or rather my fellow-passengers have advocated me—their spokesman, as it were——

THOMSON [*still attending to* DUKE]. Go away.

LINGLEY. And I thought this might be a good moment to approach a somewhat——

THOMSON [*turning on him positively*]. Will you go away, sir?

LINGLEY. Certainly. [*Retires.*] I've no wish to stay where I'm not wanted. [*Goes back to his seat.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How very rude!

LINGLEY. I don't believe he's the examiner at all.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Of course, Mr Duke will get off lightly. [*Rises.*] A friend at Court, you see. Influence! Ah! It's always the same. Shall *I* say something to him?

LINGLEY. Good Lor', madam, *no*.

THOMSON [*to* DUKE]. Feeling better now?

DUKE. I'm very sorry, sir. But it means such a lot to me. You understand.

THOMSON. Perfectly. I had exactly the same feeling when it happened to *me*. But you've nothing to worry about except your work.

DUKE. I'm full of energy.

THOMSON. Then you can start your apprenticeship now and help me with this bunch. By the way, there aren't many of you.

DUKE. No, sir.

THOMSON. Then it won't take long, and we can get on shore for dinner.

LINGLEY. Sir, if I find my trial's being 'scamped' I shall appeal.

THOMSON [*to* SCRUBBY]. Take that man away, will you?

SCRUBBY. Certainly, sir. This way, Mr Lingley.

LINGLEY [*as he goes out, left*]. It's disgraceful.

THOMSON. And the rest had better wait *with* him—outside.

SCRUBBY. Very good, sir. Will you all come this way, please?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*making a large sweep towards* THOMSON]. How do you do? [*Seeing she is ignored, she follows the others out.*] Oh!

[TOM *goes out, left, followed by* MRS MIDGET.

THOMSON. That's all. [SCRUBBY *follows them off, left*]. Now, we'll get to work.

DUKE. Yes, sir.

THOMSON. Let's see; who have we got on board? [*Reads from his notebook.*] Cliveden-Banks, Midget, Prior, and the officious gent who spoke to me—yourself.

DUKE. There's an awfully nice quiet young couple.

THOMSON. Oh? I don't remember them. They're not on the passenger list. We'll begin with the officious one. [*Calls.*] Scrubby! [*Goes up centre and returns.*] Where's that fellow got to?

SCRUBBY [*appearing*]. Here, sir.

THOMSON. Oh! [*Reading*] Show in Mr Feltmann.

SCRUBBY [*calling off left*]. Mr Feltmann!

DUKE. There's no Feltmann on board, Thomson!

THOMSON. Isn't there?

SCRUBBY [*calling off left louder*]. Mr Feltmann!

DUKE. Not that I know of.

[*There is a pause. Then* THOMSON *rises, goes up to left opening and calls—looking off as he does so.*

THOMSON. Feltmann, come here.

[*Then* LINGLEY *appears in the opening.*

LINGLEY. You were looking at *me*?

THOMSON. Yes. Come in. Sit down. [*Returns to seat.*] *There.* [LINGLEY *comes slowly in and sits down.*

LINGLEY. Well?

THOMSON. Well, sir?

LINGLEY. You've made a mistake. My name's Lingley, of Lingley, Limited.

THOMSON. Your name's Feltmann. At least, that was the name of your parents.

LINGLEY. No, sir. My name's Lingley. And I'm sorry to see you mixing up things to begin with. I'm a business man, and mistakes annoy me. You see, my fellow-passengers have practically left everything in my hands. Now if you'll just put your cards on the table we——

THOMSON. Is your name Feltmann, or is it *not*?

LINGLEY. It is *not*.

THOMSON. Very well, then, your case is over. Get up.

LINGLEY. Wait. My name *is* Feltmann. [LINGLEY *sits slowly.*

THOMSON. Why did you say it wasn't?

LINGLEY. Business.

THOMSON. Rascality.

LINGLEY [*rather truculent*]. What am I charged with, anyway?

THOMSON. Just being yourself.

LINGLEY. I am very proud of being myself. From small beginnings I have worked up to great things. I have never hesitated for a second, but always kept to the straight path. I am an honest British merchant —my bank-balance will show you that—and that I have a career behind me any self-made man might be proud of. I await my just reward.

THOMSON. You shall get it, honest British merchant. As a matter of fact, you're not British at all, Feltmann. You were born in Leipzig. You commenced your career by breaking a playmate's head against a granite curb because he had a painted tin horse. You wanted to get it.

LINGLEY. Well, I got it.

THOMSON. Oh, I'll grant you that! That's how you've made that glorious straight path you boast about. By knocking down anyone who came across it or tried to turn you off it. Well, you'll have to *learn*, that's all.

LINGLEY. I've not been wicked—people respect me.

THOMSON. Do they? To your face, perhaps. Come. [*Over to above table.*] Feltmann, you're a business man. [*Sits.*] I'm ready to admit that. Some men get found out during their lives. You're only found out now. Come, off you get.

[HENRY *and* ANN *appear at the centre door, coming from left. They hesitate, looking in for a second, as if awaiting their turn, then pass on right.* DUKE *sees them.*

LINGLEY. I—I——

THOMSON. There is no appeal. You will suffer as you made others suffer. [*Pause.*

[THOMSON'S *manner is not hard and vindictive. He is kindly, tolerant, and possibly even reluctant to dole out justice. But he is firm and just.*

LINGLEY [*after a pause*]. Give me a second chance.

THOMSON. Did *you* give anybody a second chance? No, you must learn, my son. [*He turns and makes a note in his book.*

[LINGLEY *looks defiantly for a moment at* THOMSON, *whose back is turned, as if he'd like to strike him. This he attempts to do. But is suddenly stopped.*

THOMSON [*turning. Quietly*]. That's all.

[LINGLEY *slowly turns and goes out centre to left, utterly broken and dejected.*

DUKE. Thomson!

THOMSON. Don't look so shocked. It must be done. Suffering sometimes works wonderful transformations. Let's hope, boy, let's hope. Scrubby!

SCRUBBY. Sir!

THOMSON [*to* SCRUBBY]. Just see he goes the right way.

SCRUBBY. Very good, sir. [*He follows* LINGLEY.

DUKE [*rises*]. I wish you'd see the young couple next. I know *they* must be suffering.

THOMSON. What young couple is this?

DUKE. I told you about them.

THOMSON. Yes, but I've had no information from any other quarter. It's funny.

DUKE. They seem so devoted. You'll have a pleasant job with them, I know.

THOMSON. But who exactly are they?

DUKE. Well, I used to call them, to myself, "the lovers."

[SCRUBBY *has appeared again in the centre.*

THOMSON. Steward, do you know anything about a young couple on this boat?

SCRUBBY. Oh, those two, sir! You wouldn't want to see them.

DUKE. Not see them?

THOMSON. Why *shouldn't* I want to see them?

SCRUBBY. They're 'half-ways,' sir.

THOMSON. 'Half-ways.' Oh, that explains it. No, it wouldn't be much use my seeing them. Show in—Mrs Cliveden-Banks

SCRUBBY. Yes, sir. [*He goes out left.*

DUKE. You're not even going to see them?

THOMSON. I *can't*, old boy.

DUKE [*curiously*]. What is a 'half-way,' Thomson?

THOMSON. You'll learn, Duke, you'll learn in good time.

[SCRUBBY *appears again, announcing.*

DUKE. But I wish you would——

SCRUBBY. Mrs Cliveden-Banks!

[*She enters left and gushingly crosses to* THOMSON. SCRUBBY *goes.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How do you do? How *do* you do? *Very* pleased to meet you.

THOMSON. Delighted to meet you, Mrs Cliveden-Banks. Come and sit down.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Thank you. Very sultry weather for the time of the year, isn't it? Still, we've had a lovely passage, haven't we, *dear* Mr Duke?

DUKE. Oh, yes, delightful, *dear* Mrs Cliveden-Banks.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. It was a bit rough at first, though, I must admit. Between ourselves, I was publicly ill on several occasions, but I didn't mind. I love giving pleasure to others.

THOMSON. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Oh, I did, I did. Thanks to your kind friend, Mr Duke. We clung together like limpets. I really don't know *what* I should have done without him. What wonderful men our Church turns out, Mr—er——

THOMSON. Thomson, madam.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. No; surely not one of the *Berkshire* Thomsons?

THOMSON. Not that I am aware of.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Ah! a pity. My great-great-grandfather was a Berkshire Thomson.

THOMSON. Really—my great-great-grandfather was hanged for horse-thieving.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How awkward for him, especially at the time!

THOMSON. Mrs Cliveden-Banks——

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Do you play golf?

THOMSON. I play indifferently.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I think all men ought to play golf. It keeps them away from home such a lot. My husband, Colonel Cliveden-Banks, is quite an expert, I believe—he's plus fours—or all fours—or four all.

THOMSON. Oh, yes, Bunny's hot stuff. I was having a round with him not long ago.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I'm so glad to hear it. [*A pause, then sud-*

*denly*] *What* did you say? You had a round with my husband not long ago?

THOMSON. He was in terrific form after lunch.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*alarmed*]. When was this?

THOMSON. Oh, about a week ago, I think.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. But I don't understand. Is he *here*?

THOMSON. He's waiting for you.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Then it *is* Hell!

THOMSON [*rises*]. Yes, we had a great game. He'll tell you all about it when you land.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I *don't land!* How did *he* get here?

THOMSON. Poor old Bunny died a couple of months ago.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How wicked of him. He might have let me know.

THOMSON. Perhaps he didn't think you'd care very much one way or the other.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Why not? There was life insurance—how like him, how very like him. Always self-centred. Look at the passage-money I've wasted! [*Suddenly*] Benjamin and I are *both* dead, then?

[*She moves to chair left of table.*

THOMSON. Quite dead.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*hopefully*]. That makes the marriage null and void.

THOMSON. Your marriage is only just beginning.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How droll you are! But how nice of you to put it that way.

THOMSON. Now will you go ashore? You'll find everything most comfortable. A villa, servants, all you want—and your husband waiting—with outstretched arms.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Yes, I can see him; exactly like a monkey.

THOMSON. I hope you will be able to see his *heart*. I know it's aching for you very badly.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How ghastly!

THOMSON. What's the matter?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. What *right's* he got to bob up again like this?

THOMSON. Every right, and we're very glad to have him here. Your husband is a very useful man.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. How well I know that phrase! It has always been used of Benjamin in every new office he's undertaken, at the start. Later he invariably got the push.

[HENRY *and* ANN *pass the centre door again during this speech, look anxiously in, and then pass on left.*

THOMSON. And do you know why? Because of his wife's malicious tongue.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*rises, crosses to left*]. How dare you! I'm sure I've never said anything nasty about anyone—except when it was for their good. I've certainly never said anything bad about Benjamin. I don't know that I've said anything good about him, because there's nothing good *to* say about him. [*Sits.*

THOMSON. There is a very great deal of good in Bunny. But it was always stifled back by you. He was a staunch, a devoted husband—look what he gave *you*—and what did you give in return? Nothing!

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. But I haven't seen him for years.

THOMSON. It was *your* neglect—not his.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Oh, but he looks so funny.

THOMSON. The only funny thing about him is that he wants to see you. Why he should *want* to see you is beyond me. But he does, and he's going to.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. And what shall I be exactly?

THOMSON. You'll be his wife; and in time you will learn to be a *good* wife.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I refuse absolutely.

THOMSON. You *can't* refuse. [*With finality.*

[*A long pause.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. I won't do it! I won't, I won't.

DUKE. Why won't you, Mrs Cliveden-Banks?

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. *He* knows—ask him. [*Indicating* THOMSON.

DUKE. Mr Thomson——? [THOMSON *is silent, waiting.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*to* THOMSON]. You know as well as I do, it's his eyes. The look in his eyes. You know I couldn't face them any more——

THOMSON. Yes;—you never could look him in the eyes. You're a thoroughly bad lot. You trapped him; you were grasping, you made him marry you. You—you—you——

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Don't let me down before *him*.

[*Indicating* DUKE.

THOMSON. I wouldn't if you'd been a *good* harlot, but you weren't, you were a bad one.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS [*pause*]. Rather a vulgar way of putting it! Anyway, I was nothing of the sort.

DUKE. She always said she was a soldier's daughter.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. And so I *am*! I'm the daughter of a lance-corporal. And mother never even knew his regiment. Is that frank enough for you, Mr Duke?

DUKE. Dear, dear, only a poor unfortunate after all.

THOMSON. No, Duke, *not* a poor unfortunate. This old woman was once a beautiful young girl, outwardly, but she was never an unfortunate,

never. She's been just a schemer. And somehow she's always managed to fall on her feet. There were two other men before she met Cliveden-Banks, richer men too than he was then. But she saw something *steady* in Bunny, so she made him marry her. He found out all about it later—and he's never told her. Too unselfish—too 'big'—too loyal. So she goes back to him. I hope he *beats* her—but I know he won't. Anyway, she'll get her punishment. The eyes that made her run away. Only remember, Mrs Cliveden-Banks, it won't be Bunny who'll know now, it will be you and I and everybody *except* Bunny. He'll have forgotten. [*Over to left of table.*

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. Um! Now let me see. A villa—servants. And you really think Benjamin would idolize me? Oh, well, I suppose it might be worse. I'll go. [*Rises, crosses to centre.*

THOMSON. Of *course* you will.

MRS CLIVEDEN-BANKS. For his sake, yes. I see it's my duty to. Ah, duty, duty, such a compelling thing. Speaking of duties, there are no *customs*, I suppose? No. Good. Perhaps you'll both come and dine with the Colonel and me—one night. Good-bye, Mr—[*moves up centre to door*]—er—Tomkins. [*Pause.*] You swine! [*She goes out right.*

THOMSON. Phew! this place wants fumigating. [HENRY *and* ANN *appear from left and pause anxiously.* HENRY *catches* DUKE'S *eye, and his appealing look is understood by* DUKE. DUKE *attracts* THOMSON'S *attention to them.*] Eh? [*Turns and looks toward* HENRY *and* ANN—*then back to* DUKE.] Is this the—er—couple?

DUKE [*nods "Yes"*]. Can't you——?

THOMSON [*to* HENRY *and* ANN, *shaking his head benignly*]. Not *yet*, my children. [HENRY *and* ANN *retire centre.*

DUKE [*after watching them off curiously, turns to* THOMSON]. Thomson—what *are* 'half-ways'? [*Before* THOMSON *can reply* PRIOR *enters left excitedly.*

TOM. Duke—Duke!

DUKE. Yes. [*Cross left.*

TOM. Make him see *me* next.

DUKE. Really, Prior——

TOM. You must, I can't stand the suspense. My nerves aren't right—and I can't stand it.

DUKE. There's nothing to worry about.

TOM [*shouts*]. I tell you I can't stand it. I want to be put out.

THOMSON [*turning and coming down*]. What's the matter, boy?

TOM. Oh, sir, if you please, I want you to deal with me next. It isn't fair treating me like the others—I'm very highly strung.

THOMSON. Come in, boy, come in and don't be frightened. [*Passes* TOM *to chair left of table.*] We're not going to hurt you.

TOM. Ha! The dentist! [THOMSON *leads him over.*

THOMSON. There, sit down there. Now what's the trouble?

TOM. I want to be dealt with, sir. I want to *know.*

THOMSON. Calm yourself, boy, calm yourself. [*Giving him glass*] Drink this. You're fond of your drink, I know.

TOM. Thanks, sir. [*Drinks and then holds out glass again.*

THOMSON. Well, what do you want? [*Goes right of table and sits.*

TOM. I want to be killed—I want to be killed.

THOMSON. Um! Healthy outlook you've got, haven't you?

TOM. No, I haven't. I'm a weak character. I want to be let off lightly. I want to be hit over the head with a stone and finished.

THOMSON [*rises*]. Duke, send ashore for a bag of stones, will you?

TOM. Oh, don't joke! I'll drop all sarcasm—it's the only thing that kept me going up till now—but I'll drop it now if you will.

THOMSON. Certainly. [*Sits right of table.*

TOM. I know—at least I guess what you're doing with the others. You're keeping them going, keeping them going with punishments and promises and things. Well, *I* don't want to be kept going. I want blank.

THOMSON. Impossible.

TOM. But I'm dead. [*Rises.*] And I demand the right to be properly dead. I've always dreamt about being dead—when I've slept at all.

THOMSON. How old are you?

TOM [*sits*]. Oh, hundreds of years—I must be. Give me blank.

THOMSON. You're going on like the others. You've got to.

TOM. I won't, I won't!

THOMSON. You'll find it quite easy to forget here, you know.

TOM. Easy to forget what? You're not suggesting I'm to go on, and without *this*? [*The glass.*

[MRS MIDGET *appears left.*

THOMSON. Yes.

TOM. Is that all I'm to forget?

THOMSON. Yes.

TOM. As if I could! As if I would, anyway. You damned torturer. I see what you want me to do. You want me to chuck drink, develop a nice clean brain, and remember all the other horrors! No, I won't do it. It's all I've got, it's my only comfort, and if I'm to go on I won't give it up. See? But I'm not going to go on. Kill me! There, it's not asking much. And look at all the trouble it will spare you. I'm not worth saving. I'm not really.

THOMSON. You've suffered.

TOM. Ha! Yes, I'm a martyr and a saint, I am—but you can't see my crown because I've pawned it.

THOMSON. Can't I do *anything*?

TOM. No, you can't. [*Rises and goes up centre.*

MRS MIDGET [*quietly from the back*]. Perhaps *I* could, sir.

THOMSON [*facing sharply*]. What do you want?

MRS MIDGET. My name's Midget, sir. Excuse me bargein' in as it were, but——

THOMSON. I'm very pleased to meet you—yes, yes, I know all about you. But you've no business here yet.

MRS MIDGET. Oh, but I *have*. You see, yer Reverence, when I first got on to this big boat nobody would speak to me. I was lost, as it were—was—and then young Mr Prior was very kind to me. *'E* spoke to me and broke the icicles, as is said, and if he is in trouble I really don't feel I could put my 'ead on my pillow to-night—if I 'ave one—after what 'e done for me. [*Goes to* TOM, *touches him.*] Now, what is all this fluster and to do, anyway? It's about the booze, ain't it?

TOM. Booze—eh? Oh, well—yes—drink *is* certainly mixed up with it.

MRS MIDGET. Nasty 'orrid stuff.

TOM. Beautiful stuff, Mrs Midget.

MRS MIDGET. Mind you, I don't say there's any 'arm in a man 'avin' 'is beer if he wants 'is beer, but the man I does object to is the man who's *always* wanting it. I shouldn't think you've ever 'ad much of a *chance*, though, 'ave you, sir?

TOM. I've had every chance, Mrs Midget. I was spoilt. I was ungrateful. I ruined—— Please drop it.

MRS MIDGET [*pause*]. There was a girl, too, wasn't there?

TOM. Be quiet!

MRS MIDGET [*another pause*]. There *was* a girl, though, wasn't there?

TOM. Oh, yes, there was. How did you know?

MRS MIDGET. She was the final old 'ow do you do, I take it?

TOM. As you so poetically express it, she *was*.

[HENRY *and* ANN *appear at door centre, and unseen by the others stand listening apprehensively.*

MRS MIDGET. She chucked you, didn't she? But you'll be different now. I know something about girls and—your Reverence, [*behind* TOM *to* THOMSON] I dare say this particular one might come along here some day?

THOMSON. It's quite possible. But it doesn't always follow, Mrs Midget, that just because a boy and girl are sweethearts they may always go on together here. On the contrary, they're sometimes *separated*—so much depends—so much depends.

[ANN *utters a faint wail, and* HENRY *leads her farther back into the shadows up left, where they remain enviously watching the rest of the scene.* MRS MIDGET *looks sympathetically at* HENRY *and* ANN; *then resumes to* TOM.

MRS MIDGET. What a triumph it would be for you if *your* girl suddenly appeared 'ere and found you! Mind yer, it *might* 'appen, settled down and smart and respectable like, with a good job and a decent salary reg'lar every Saturday. [*To* THOMSON] I suppose you've got jobs 'ere, 'aven't you?

THOMSON. Plenty.

MRS MIDGET. Now what you want is a nice, good, honest, steady respectable housekeeper who'd take care of you.

TOM [*annoyed*]. Mrs Midget——!

MRS MIDGET. Yes, *she* might do. Then all your things would be properly looked after. With everything mended and darned ready for yer to put on. Some one to see yer didn't sit up too late, too often. No fussing, mind, and call you in the morning with a nice 'ot cup of tea. What time do you get up?

TOM. What time do they open?

MRS MIDGET. Oh, you can 'ave your drinks, as long as you don't let them interfere with your meals or take away your appetite. I'm a good cook I am, and if you left anything untouched it would upset me awful.

THOMSON. Mrs Midget, you're suggesting.

MRS MIDGET. I was *thinking* of it, yes.

THOMSON. Very fine, very fine of you, but there's a little cottage waiting for you, with a garden by the sea.

MRS MIDGET [*enthusiastic*]. There we *are*, then! The very spot. [*Sudden change to the practical.*] 'As it got a good sink?

THOMSON. You don't quite follow. True, Mr Prior is free to do as he chooses, but he has not yet arrived on the same plane as you have. He would not be allowed to live there to begin with, anyway.

MRS MIDGET. Then why can't I go where *he's* going? That's simple enough.

THOMSON. It would mean going back to the *slums*.

MRS MIDGET. And what's the matter with the slums. They're all right. Religion is simply rampant in some of them.

TOM. I won't listen to the idea.

MRS MIDGET [*pleading*]. You can always give me a week's notice.

TOM. I'm not worth bothering about.

MRS MIDGET. I'm willing to 'ave a shot.

TOM. I can't understand this extraordinary interest, anyway.

MRS MIDGET. One good turn deserves another. Sir, wouldn't the

people who spoilt you be glad if they knew you was in capable 'ands?

TOM. They would be, I suppose.

MRS MIDGET. *And* doing well? [*With growing fervour.*

TOM. Er—yes—of course.

MRS MIDGET. That might ease those 'orrid thoughts of yours a bit too, mightn't it?

TOM. It might.

MRS MIDGET. Well, then, ain't it worth it?

TOM. This is another trap.

MRS MIDGET. Velvet-lined, sir.

TOM. Please don't keep on calling me "sir." I'm not a gentleman really.

MRS MIDGET. Aren't you, sir?

TOM. No, I'm not. If I were, I shouldn't be hesitating as I am. Mr Examiner, help me. *You* must be experienced in making decisions.

THOMSON. No, boy, I can't help you in this. It's your own choice.

TOM. Duke, I——

DUKE. You know what Mr Thomson said. It's for you to speak.

TOM. Very well, then. [*Pause.*] I'll go. [*Rising and going up centre. Another pause.*] By myself!

DUKE. Prior!

TOM. *I'm not worth bothering about.*

THOMSON. And in those very words you've proved you are! Because you really meant 'em. Humility, my boy, humility! Take him away, Mrs What's-a-name and do the best you can with him. And jolly good luck to you both, you couple of rascals.

TOM. Mind you, I won't promise—I won't promise to be good.

MRS MIDGET. No, sir, we'll just 'ope—mutual like.

TOM [*fingering his glass*]. It's going to be difficult—yes, it's going to be difficult.

THOMSON. *That's* the way.

TOM. Thanks awfully. [*Sets down glass.*] And I will try.

[*He goes out on to the deck and off right.* MRS MIDGET, *overjoyed, starts to follow him.*

THOMSON. Good day, Mrs Prior—you're a good mother.

MRS MIDGET [*turning on* THOMSON *ferociously*]. Blast you, how did you find out? Blast you! [*Then suddenly changing to pleading pitifully*] You'll never tell 'im, will you? Promise you'll never let him know.

THOMSON. I promise.

MRS MIDGET [*going to* DUKE *and clutching him*]. And you too, sir?

DUKE. I promise, of course.

MRS MIDGET [*turning back*]. Thank you both. You see, he mustn't even guess. Oh, sirs, ain't it wonderful? He doesn't know me, and I've got him to look after at last—— Without any fear of me disgracing him. It's 'eaven, that's what it is—it's 'eaven!

TOM [*off*]. Mrs Midget.

MRS MIDGET. He wants me at last—yes, dearie, I'm coming.

[*She goes out centre in ecstasy, and off right.*

[THOMSON *with a pleased chuckle stands left of door with his back to* HENRY *and* ANN, *watching her out.* DUKE *stands further down right.* HENRY *and* ANN *drop down to extreme left.*

THOMSON [*after a pause*]. Come along, Duke.

[*He comes down a bit, takes* DUKE *by the arm in a most fraternal way, and without looking back goes out centre and off right.*

[DUKE *follows, but hesitates at door a moment, and looks back at* HENRY *and* ANN, *who stand mystified and fearful.* HENRY *makes a slight but frantic gesture of appeal to* DUKE, *as if to say "But what about us?"* DUKE *looks at them sympathetically, but shrugs his shoulders helplessly.* DUKE *follows and disappears.* HENRY *and* ANN *stand hopeless and bewildered, they look from one to the other curiously; then she, terror-stricken in awful apprehension of the uncertainty of their plight, at their being ignored, at the mystery of it all, suddenly clutches* HENRY'S *arm and holds to him tightly.*

## SCENE 2

*The scene is now as it was before, the small table which was used for the meeting having been removed. It is moonlight outside. The moonlight pours in through the portholes and through the centre door, which is wide open.*

SCRUBBY *enters from the left. He collects a few glasses, and places them on a tray. He is tidying up. He then goes through the door behind the bar. Once more the mysterious drum is heard, and* ANN *appears from the deck.*

ANN. Henry! [*Goes to left.*] Henry! Henry, where are you? I want you! [*Up again.*] Henry! Henry!

[*Left.*

HENRY [*from centre opening*]. Yes, dear?

ANN. Where have you been?

HENRY. Looking at the sea——

ANN. You know we've sailed again.

HENRY. Yes.

ANN. Why have we both been left behind?

HENRY. I don't know, dear. But what does it matter? We've been left together.

ANN. Yes, you and I.

HENRY. The lights of that place have gone now.

ANN [*up to* HENRY *up centre*]. Where were you just now? Where were you?

HENRY. Looking at the sea.

ANN [*arm in arm down centre*]. I've taken a dislike to the sea, husband. It seems to me we should keep terribly close.

HENRY. Why, dear?

ANN. Can't you ever feel when things are passing over you? Bad things? I can. They're round us now, all round. They've been round us ever since we left that harbour.

HENRY. Why weren't *we* judged?

ANN. I don't know—and I don't know why you left me for a while. [*Sits.*

HENRY. I thought I heard a dog bark. It was Jock. What's that?

ANN. What?

HENRY. Something seemed to touch my hand. [*He is uneasy.*] We should have insisted on being heard. We were cowards.

ANN. Not because we are ashamed of our love.

HENRY. No. Because we were afraid of being separated.

ANN. Yes. [*A faint, very faint, sound of breaking glass off right.*

HENRY [*pause—listens*]. It's strange, that tinkling noise like glass—sharp pieces of glass falling on stone. Do you hear it, Ann?

ANN. No, dear.

HENRY. My nerves are all on edge. I'd have sworn I did. Ann, where are we going to?

ANN. I can't think. [*Rises, pause.*] Perhaps it's the dreadful house with the double staircase in the hall. You know.

HENRY. The stairs I ran up and down trying to find you.

ANN. Perhaps it isn't a dream-place at all.

HENRY. Ann, since we left that harbour I feel we are bound for some place dimly remembered. . . . Ann, I feel—a breeze like a breath of new—of different air.

ANN. They didn't question us. Perhaps it's freedom.

HENRY. Ann, Ann! Wife, wife! Don't let's get away from each

other. We don't know where we are, we don't know what's becoming to us, or where we're going.

ANN. I don't really care what's becoming to me as long as I am with my husband. What else matters? But if *you* went away from me——

HENRY. It seems you're rather leaning on me now!

ANN. Shares, Henry.

HENRY. Shares, Ann.

ANN. You see, I love you. I love you so much. I love the way you walk, the way you hold your head. I love *you*. I love your mouth.

[ANN *kisses him, and then sits down.* HENRY *kneels with his arm round her.*

HENRY. My wonderful Ann! They won't separate us now, will they, Ann? Nothing can take one from the other now?

ANN. Nothing—nothing.

HENRY. Keep close, though, keep close. . . . Are *you* cold?

ANN [*takes hold of him*]. No. I've got you, darling, I've got you.

HENRY. Never let go.

ANN. Why aren't we closer? I thought we *would* be when we're dead.

HENRY. I thought there would be no need for speech. That *we*, the *real* you and I would drift away together. Where is the utter completeness? Oh, Ann—Ann——

ANN. Supposing, after all, we were wrong.

HENRY. Wrong?—how wrong? What was that? [*Rises.*

ANN. Just supposing——

HENRY. Ann—— [*Listening.*

[SCRUBBY *comes in quickly. He puts down the empty tray on bar.*

SCRUBBY. Good evening, madam. Good evening, sir. [*Goes left.*

ANN. Good evening, Scrubby.

HENRY. Ann!!

ANN. Yes, dear?

HENRY. There's Jock barking. [*Stepping right a pace.*

ANN. Don't be silly.

SCRUBBY. Who's Jock, ma'am?

ANN. Our dog—at home.

HENRY. Listen! Listen! [*Stepping farther right.*

ANN. Don't be silly, Henry.

HENRY. I'd like *him* to be with us. Jock!

SCRUBBY. Keep close to him, miss, if you'll take my advice.

HENRY. You can tell us, you can help, can't you? Where are we going to?

SCRUBBY. We just go on like this, sir—forwards and backwards—backwards and forwards.

HENRY. For ever?

ANN. Alone?

SCRUBBY. Yes, quite alone. Until——

HENRY [*slightly excited*]. Why is this happening to us?

SCRUBBY. It happens to all 'half-ways' like—like we are.

ANN. But what are we, Scrubby? We—we 'half-ways'?

SCRUBBY. We're the people who ought to have had more courage.

ANN. For what?

SCRUBBY. To face life.

ANN. Do you remember how you became a 'half-way'?

SCRUBBY. Oh, no. I've been allowed to forget. I hope you'll be allowed to forget. It would be too cruel if they didn't let you forget in time that you killed yourselves.

ANN. Scrubby! [*She rises.*

HENRY [*cries out*]. My God! That's it! Now I remember! Suicide!

SCRUBBY. Keep closer to him, madam.

HENRY. The people who ought to have had more courage! I see. *That's* what we've done that wasn't right.

ANN. Henry! [*Goes to him.*

HENRY. The little bits are fitting together.

ANN. Dear, don't worry.

HENRY. Ann, I wanted to forget. [*Collapses on chair above table.*] Oh, don't say the damned torture's going to start all over again. We'd reached the end of our tether as it was. Ann——

ANN. I'm with you still——

[*She stands behind his chair and puts her arm round him.*

HENRY. But you can't face it, Ann, you can't stand it any more. I won't let you suffer—not another second. We'll kill ourselves, dear, and forget in each other's arms. Then we'll be so happy, sweet, so happy for ever. [*Pause.*] Oh, but it's over. We *have* killed ourselves. And we're not happy.

ANN. No—we're not. [*Sits down.*

HENRY. We can't stand it, Ann.

ANN [*after a pause*]. We've got to.

SCRUBBY. Why did you kill yourselves?

ANN [*pause*]. We weren't married, Scrubby.

SCRUBBY. Weren't you, madam? Oh, you two poor dears! Pardon my familiarity.

HENRY. I was trapped into a marriage.

ANN. He's so guileless, Scrubby.

HENRY [*indicating* ANN]. Ann came to me in such a wonderful way. It was like dawn.

ANN. They'd been so cruel to him, Scrubby. Never an atom of love in his whole life before, was there, Henry?

HENRY. Never. Ann was the only true and good thing I've ever met. We loved. We loved. I gave my soul for love, as Ann gave hers. We got so *near* each other that we *knew* that there was only one minute spiritual barrier between us, and that we believed was Death. Death can unify utterly. We believed that—and yet we are just as if we had never died.

SCRUBBY. You killed *yourselves*.

ANN. We should have waited?

SCRUBBY. Yes.

ANN. Oh, Scrubby—you don't know the agony we've been through. The way people talked—the things they said.

HENRY. Lies—such bloody lies! [*Rises.*

ANN. They smeared our love—smeared——

HENRY. With their dirty tongues.

ANN. You see, Scrubby, we didn't conceal it—we didn't pretend.

HENRY. We weren't ashamed. We started so proudly, so proudly.

ANN. Till we were beaten down so bruised, so hurt.

HENRY. But we should have gone on?

ANN. Yes.

SCRUBBY. And now you children are faced with memories.

HENRY. I remember the long sweep into the dark. The last thing I saw was Jock's face against the window. I can see him now—almost feel him—Jock!—— [*Stooping as if to pet the dog*] Jock!

SCRUBBY. *Outside* the window, sir?

HENRY. Yes—outside. [*To* ANN] And then you, Ann—I haven't taken care of you well enough, and I've been a coward. [ANN *rises.*] Oh! to be given back even a little while—to try again. Our future here isn't hell, it isn't heaven, it's past imagination.

SCRUBBY. Eternity.

HENRY. Ann, Ann, I must save you. I promise that I will. I'm the man. Oh, it's my fault, it's all my fault. We didn't understand, dear, that we should have been true and brave and fearless. Then nothing could have hurt us wherever we were, whatever we have been, or may be.

ANN. It's too late now.

HENRY [*moving away*]. Let me think, dear. There must be a way out. Let me think. The air seems fresher out here.

[*Walks slowly to the deck and leans over rail. After a few seconds during the following dialogue walks slowly up and*

*down, passing and repassing the entrance. Gradually a bigger pause between each pass till he doesn't come past.*

SCRUBBY. Don't let him go too far, madam. Call him now.

ANN. Henry!

HENRY. Ann!

ANN. Don't go too far away.

HENRY [*off*]. No, dear!

ANN [*crosses to* SCRUBBY]. Why aren't people kinder to each other, Scrubby?

SCRUBBY [ANN *sits left*]. Being unkind comes more natural to most people, I'm afraid.

ANN. I'd try to be kinder if I had it over again. Now there's no one left here to be kind to.

SCRUBBY [*crosses right to table*]. Present company excepted. What did you like best in life?

ANN. I liked so many things. I loved the earth, the scent of the earth, of newly cut grass after rain; and the trees, and all clear things like water. Are you very lonely, Scrubby?

SCRUBBY. Oh, no, ma'am, not on the whole. I've all sorts of comforting little thoughts locked up in my brain, so when I get a bit monotonous I just turn the key and out come the thoughts to dance in front of me. Very whimsical and entertaining some of them are too, I must say.

ANN. I do hope we'll get on together. When I was living I did want people to look after, but I had so few friends. Now I've none excepting you.

SCRUBBY. You'll find lots of new friends, ma'am. Not quite the same, but most consoling. The birds come on board occasionally—and the sky appreciates a clean, 'good morning,' and the sea's in a good temper sometimes. Don't always think of nature as men and women. If you're kind to nature, nature will understand. These are some of my comforts. You want the earth again. But the sea will tell your wish to the clouds maybe, and perhaps some little drifting cloud will float with the news over to the land, and rest above the cool trees and the yellow gorse and the grass near the chalk-pits. So though you can't get the earth again, ma'am, the earth may know. And let's hope she will, and send back her kind regards and very best wishes. Call him again.

ANN. Call him? Why?

SCRUBBY. Call him.

ANN. Henry! Henry! [*A pause.*] Henry! [*Long pause. Rises and goes up centre, exits and returns. Another pause—goes out left and re-enters. At opening, left, screams.*] Henry! Henry!! [*Pause.*] He

must be here. He must be here. [*She dashes on to the deck again. Looks round. Then returning cries once more, wildly.*] Henry!

[*There is no answer. She looks at* SCRUBBY *questioningly.*

SCRUBBY. He has gone.

ANN [*screams*]. Henry!! You haven't looked.

SCRUBBY. Useless.

ANN. What do you mean? [*Quiet now.*

SCRUBBY. I know what's happened to him.

ANN. What?

SCRUBBY. He lives again!

ANN. Lives! Henry gone back?

SCRUBBY. The dog, ma'am, outside the window. Perhaps he broke through.

ANN. Henry is gone back, alone.

SCRUBBY. He's stronger than you—more power to resist the fumes maybe.

ANN. Gone back! I'll follow him.

SCRUBBY. You can't.

ANN. Henry wouldn't leave me alone.

SCRUBBY. He couldn't help himself, madam.

ANN. But we've been dead a week——

SCRUBBY. A week! A century! A moment! There's no time here. He's gone back, madam.

ANN. Then I'll go too.

SCRUBBY. You can't.

ANN. I will. I must!

SCRUBBY. It's impossible.

ANN. *I will follow.* Henry. Henry. [*Comes down right in front of table, facing front.*] Henry dear, where are you? It's Ann, dear. Where are you, baby? Just tell me where you are? *Where are you?* I'll come, darling. Just tell me. Henry! Henry!

SCRUBBY. He won't answer.

ANN. Henry! Henry, are you in the flat? I believe you are, Henry; you mustn't be there by yourself—you won't know how to manage anything.

SCRUBBY. It's useless.

ANN. Henry, listen, Henry. Our love, our great love. [*The drum is heard again.*] It's speaking, Henry. The little wedding-ring that wasn't a wedding-ring at all—put it on my finger again. It's on the mantelpiece. Henry, don't leave me alone for ever. It's Ann, your Ann, who wants you. Henry! Henry dear! [*The drum stops.*

SCRUBBY. Quiet. Quiet. I heard something out there—on the deck. [*Another pause, then* HENRY *appears in the centre doorway.*

ANN [*without seeing him, still facing front*]. Hello, Henry!

HENRY [*coming down to her partly*]. Hello, Ann! Quick, dear, be very quick. There's only a second or two. I've come to fetch you home, dear. Ready, sweetheart? [*Holding out his hand.*

ANN. Ready, Henry, ready! [*Turning up and taking his hand.*

HENRY. We've such a lot to do, my love. And such a little time to do it in. Quick. Quick.

[*They go out together. The drum starts again very softly.* SCRUBBY *watches them go.*

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